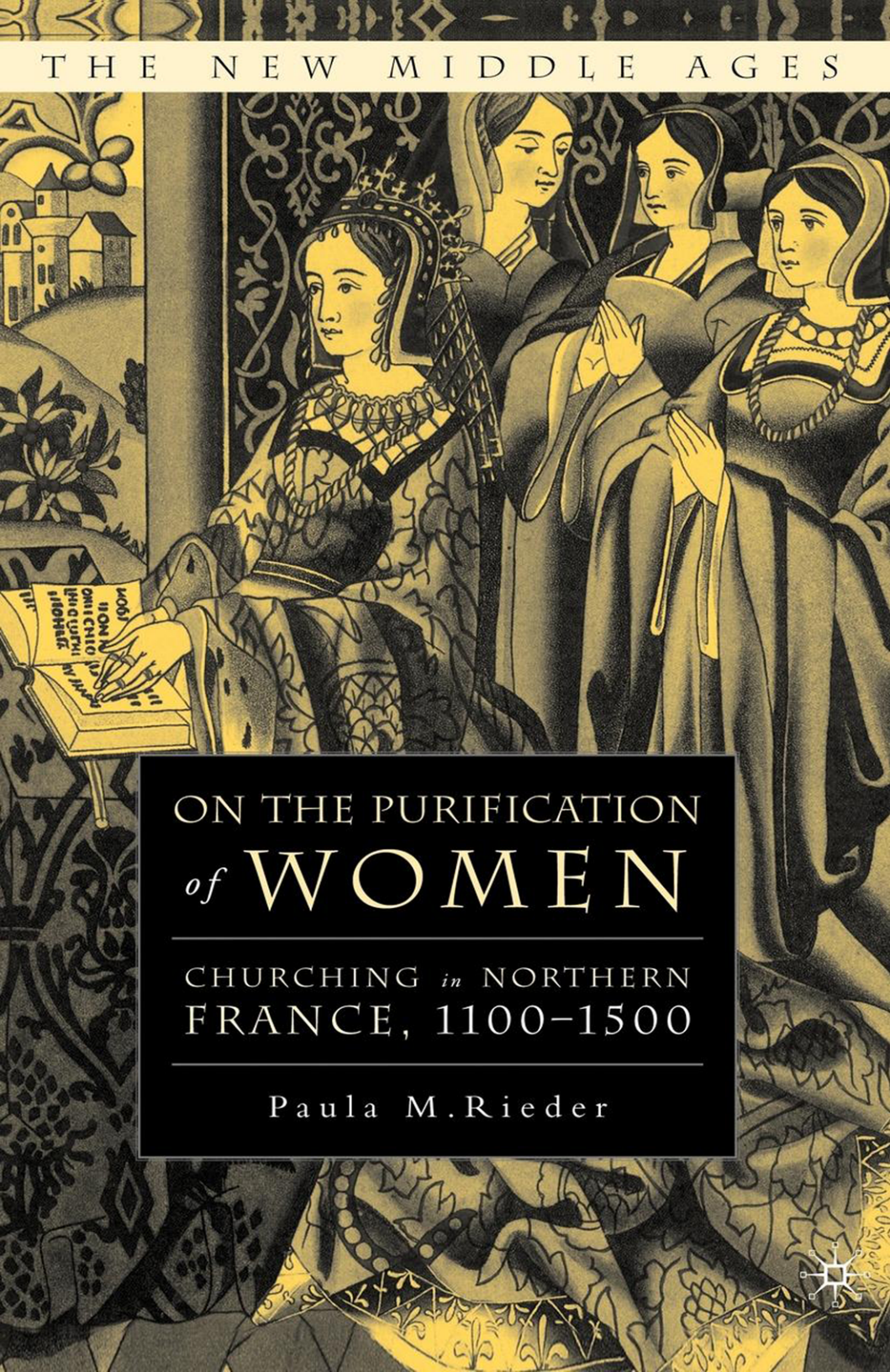
THE NEW MIDDLE AGES



ON THE PURIFICATION of WOMEN

CHURCHING in NORTHERN FRANCE, 1100–1500

Paula M. Rieder

THE NEW MIDDLE AGES

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ILLUSTRATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

CCCM	*Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1966–
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*. Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–
CNRS	Centre national de la recherche scientifique
CTHS	Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques
DACL	*Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907–
DTC	*Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1903–1950
EETS	*Early English Text Society*, London: Trübner, 1864–
NCE	*New Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1967
PL	*Patrilogia cursus completus. . .series Latina*. Paris: J-P Migne, 1844–64
SPCK	Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge

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INTRODUCTION

On Ash Wednesday of 1259, Nicola of Rouen, a choir nun at the monastery of Saint-Saens in Normandy, gave birth to her second child by Simon, the rector of the village church at Saint-Saens. The birth took place inside the monastery where Nicola was subsequently churched. The child was sent to Rouen to be raised by one of Nicola's sisters. In July of that year, during a regular episcopal visit to the monastery, Bishop Odo of Rouen heard about the child and Nicola's churching and included the information, without further comment, in his register.[1] By 1259, the purification of women after childbirth was a very old custom in France dating back, at least, to the ninth century, but at the time of Nicola's churching, the meaning and importance of this ancient custom was in flux.

The practice of churching in France went back to the early Middle Ages and began as a purification of a new mother about a month after the birth of a child. Without the purification, a woman was prohibited from entering a church for fear she would desecrate sacred space with blood pollution. Gradually, in ways that cannot be traced with any precision, customs accumulated around the purification. By the twelfth century, it was a rite performed in the parish to which the new mother came, in the company of other women, bearing a candle and an offering. We have no way to know if Nicola's churching conformed to these customs, but her purification can surely be explained in terms of sacred space. Her blood pollution would have endangered the monastery chapel and without purification Nicola would have been unable to participate in the divine office or other prayers central to her life as a choir nun. Yet even as Nicola was being purified in order to protect sacred space from blood pollution, the meaning and customs surrounding the rite were already evolving in a different direction.

While churching remained a rite of purification, the meaning and importance of that purification changed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as theologians became less concerned about blood pollution as a threat to sacred space and instead began to discuss it as an obstacle to marital intercourse. Acting in concert with this new concern, French bishops began issuing legislation aimed at controlling access to the rite. Their efforts made

churching into a privilege for properly married mothers. Unwed mothers, marginalized by these developments, continued to find illegal means of obtaining the rite, seeking the healing or spiritual comfort it offered. Bourgeois matrons and their families, on the other hand, benefited from the bishops' legislation and surrounded the celebration with secular customs intended to enhance social status and family honor. The French term for this occasion, *relevailles*, or getting up, suggests the common perception of the day as a celebration of a mother's ability to rise from childbed and return to an active life with her family. For both practical and social reasons, this was a significant moment for women and their families. Churching, consequently, became important for husbands as a means of expressing their status within the community as the head of a proper household. Thus, this "women's rite" became very useful to men. These divergent understandings of the rite ensured that churching became a site of conflict over issues of power and authority.

As a mark of social status, churching also helped to create social identities. A woman who was married to the father of her children was identified as a proper matron and a respectable member of the parish community by her right to a public churching. Conversely, women who conceived and gave birth outside of marriage were identified as sinners and marginal members of the community by being denied a proper churching. Churching, thus, helped to shape the definition of the proper woman by insisting that all mothers be married and equating unwed mothers with bad women. These definitions, in turn, shaped the borders and identities of Christian communities by including some women and their husbands and excluding other women and the men associated with them.

The liturgy of churching, celebrated at the parish church, was the main event around which these social constructions operated. As it was celebrated in late medieval northern France, churching centered on a mass attended by the new mother, her birth attendants, and family. The mass was sometimes preceded by a blessing at the church door and was always followed by the new mother receiving a blessing and the gift of *pain bénit*, blessed bread. The liturgical celebration was customarily followed by a feast honoring the new mother and her family. Following her purification, a woman was allowed and probably expected to resume her sexual role as wife, since the ritual had cleansed her of blood impurities that would have made intercourse dangerous.

By the dawn of the Reformation, churching was an ancient custom rooted so deeply in the lives of medieval women, their families, and their communities that reformers found it virtually impossible to eradicate. Between the ninth and fifteenth centuries, the ritual of churching had developed into an established liturgical form and the public service had

come to be surrounded with regulations and customs. The ideas underlying the ritual maintained a loose connection to Mosaic prescriptions against blood pollutions and the Biblical precedent of the Virgin Mary's purification, but its actual performance functioned in a variety of ways that served different and sometimes conflicting interests. Many of these meanings would not have developed had churching remained only a rite concerned with protecting sacred space. I argue that the episcopal redefinition of churching as a rite that honored marriage allowed it to evolve into a powerful element in medieval life capable of shaping social identities and the boundaries of community, especially on the local level. At the same time, the persistent notion of churching as a rite of purification underlined and confirmed the belief that women's sexuality, especially when expressed outside the boundaries of legitimate marriage, was dangerous and polluting. Though churching was a women's rite, it also served to support and maintain the patriarchal order of medieval society.

This book examines medieval churching in France: its origins and redefinition, the character and form of its liturgy, and its development as a significant event in the lives of medieval women and their families. Chapter 1 explores the roots of churching in medieval France and traces what little is known about it up to the twelfth century. Chapter 2 documents the episcopal redefinition of churching between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries and describes the contexts in which this crucial change began. In spite of the bishops' definition of churching in terms of marriage, clerics continued to describe the rite as a purification from blood, semen, and lust. This persistent understanding of churching is explored in chapter 3. The liturgy of churching, discussed in chapter 4, expressed the clerical understanding of the rite as a purification, though as a ritual the meaning of the liturgy was open to other interpretations. Chapters 5 and 6 explore the meanings of churching for women. Within the context of childbirth, churching marked the end of a woman's lying-in but also offered healing to women who had suffered through a difficult delivery. The public celebration of churching, explored in chapter 6, presented some women with a rare opportunity for recognition but served as a site of conflict for others; both experiences underline the character of churching as a women's rite that, nevertheless, expressed multiple meanings. The final chapter expands the meaning of churching beyond those of clerics and women to include husbands, families, and the communities of parish and village.

Studies of churching, such as this one, are rare. Until quite recently, the practice has been virtually ignored by scholars. Between 1909 and 1980, I am aware of only five works published on the ritual of churching and these are pastoral in tone having been generated by modern uses of churching and by the reform of the Catholic liturgy under Vatican II.[2]

Since 1980, the situation has begun to change with the publication of a number of valuable articles on the rite in medieval and early modern Europe. The most persistent questions raised in this new body of literature is whether we should consider churching as primarily a rite of purification or whether its other meanings are more important to our understanding of its role in medieval and early modern life. Unsurprisingly, given the nature of the rite, recent scholarship has also debated the significance of churching in women's lives: its impact on them, their role in shaping the rite, their interest in its continued existence.

The earliest work on churching is found in Adolph Franz's *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter* published in 1909.[3] He included one chapter on blessings for mothers in which he discussed rites for and at the birth, the blessing of a woman after the birth, the blessing for a woman on her return to church, that is, at her churching, and blessings for women who died in childbirth.[4] Under these rubrics, Franz provided a broad scope of information, including numerous examples of folk customs and hagiographic traditions related to childbirth and mothers. Franz's handling of churching is sweeping, in one sense, covering the rite in the Eastern as well as the Western Church, beginning in the third century and continuing, in some details, until the sixteenth.

On the other hand, Franz based his research almost exclusively on German-speaking sources. Among the seven ordines that Franz used as examples of the rite, one is English and the rest are from either Germany or Austria. His discussion of customs surrounding the liturgy was largely taken from German sources though he sometimes noted practices in other regions, such as the French tendency to include a mass in the rite of purification.[5] In spite of his emphasis on German sources, Franz's work is not a comprehensive study of the German practice. His story of churching is stuffed with interesting facts and anecdotes but also leaves a great deal unexplored. He noted, for example, a diversity of opinion between those who thought it was absolutely necessary that a woman stay away from church after the birth of a child and those who thought it was salutary but not obligatory;[6] but he seemed uninterested in the implications or potential impact of these different viewpoints. Moreover, his discussion shifts alarmingly from country to country and over large periods of time without any apparent concern for continuity or solid argument. Thus, his discussion of churching has some serious weaknesses. In spite of these limitations, Franz's work remains an important resource for the study of medieval churching.

Like more recent scholars, Franz was concerned with the meaning of churching. He described the prayers for a mother before, during, and after the birth, as well as the folk beliefs and customs that supported or conflicted

with these official liturgies. Childbirth emerges as a dangerous moment not only because of the mother's physical risk but also because of a lingering susceptibility to evil spirits that was only dispelled at her churching. He noted that the notions of female pollution and purification were basic to the origin and development of the liturgy of churching.[7] Nevertheless, based on statements from the official church and pontifical decrees, he considered it a prayer of thanksgiving.[8] Franz's willingness to discount the common understanding of churching in favor of the church's official opinion leads him to an understanding of churching that his own evidence does not seem to support.

Because churching is concerned with childbirth and women's role as mothers, it has great social significance. Sociologists and anthropologists have recognized this importance and struggled to understand the meaning of the rite, but have generally seen it in negative terms. Peter Rushton, writing as a sociologist, used the language of pollution devised by anthropologist Mary Douglas to explain the rite, which he believed was oppressive. He described women as "victims" of practices such as churching, which he saw as maintaining a negative ideology of reproduction.[9] The author of an anthropological study of life in rural Spain described churching as "a pernicious superstition" and "another instance of the way that women are made to feel impure."[10] Many scholars have adopted the language of anthropologist Arnold van Gennep and describe churching as a classic *rite de passage*, moving a woman from a liminal position created by the pollutions and restrictions of childbirth to full reincorporation into the family and parish community.

Such approaches to churching, as historian David Cressy has pointed out, are problematic because they tend to present the rite only from a single viewpoint rather than placing it within a wider context or considering it from a woman's point of view.[11] Recent studies by historians, mostly scholars of early modern Europe, have begun to address this problem. Most of these scholars suggest, as I do in the present work, that churching had different meanings to different audiences at different times. A notable exception is William Coster, who understands churching in Reformation England as a kind of penitential purification. Consequently, he is puzzled by the fact that women held onto the rite when ardent Puritans tried to abolish it.[12] Cressy, in contrast, emphasizes the multiple meanings of churching to women, men, Puritans, and Anglicans, as well as the fact that its meaning was hotly debated and unstable within the turbulent world of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.[13] Adrian Wilson, looking at seventeenth-century England, describes churching as part of a women's culture surrounding childbirth that allowed women to resist and challenge patriarchal authority.[14] Susan Karant-Nunn, on the other hand, argues that

churching in Reformation Germany ultimately worked for men, not women, and served to reinforce women's subjugation.[15] Using documents written between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, Becky R. Lee points out that English men understood churching as valuable for themselves, as well as their wives, long before the Reformation.[16] Finally, Gail McMurray Gibson, focusing on similarities between the annual feast of Candlemas and the liturgy of churching in late medieval England, argues that these events offered conflicting and even contradictory messages that presented women as inferior and their bodies as polluted while at the same time acknowledging female importance and power.[17]

Since 1990, our understanding of churching has moved well beyond Franz's rather disjointed beginning and has demonstrated its potential as a fruitful and fascinating window into life in premodern Europe. By examining churching over four centuries in medieval France, this book significantly deepens our understanding of the ritual and its importance. It reveals that many of the characteristics of churching in early modern England and Germany already existed in the French medieval rite. Recognizing the long history of the customs surrounding churching, especially its significance to men, allows us to understand better the persistence of this "popish" ritual into and through the Reformation. Moreover, this study argues that much of the importance and complexity of the rite, visible both in the Middle Ages and beyond, resulted from the episcopal redefinition of churching that began in the thirteenth century. Whether a comparable development occurred in other places in medieval Europe remains a question that future studies, focusing on other regions, could determine.

The relative scarcity of sources for studying churching in the Middle Ages has, no doubt, discouraged scholars from tackling the subject. No medieval cleric wrote a treatise or a sermon specifically on the purification of women after childbirth. Medical authors had little, if anything, to say about it. Regulations concerning women after childbirth were included in lists of laws and books of penance, but almost invariably without commentary. I have not found a French liturgy of churching in any priests' manual or liturgical book prior to the fourteenth century. Even then, extant liturgies are scarce; I have found only eight. While there are descriptions of the churching of medieval queens in England, French sources are nearly silent on the practice of churching among aristocratic and royal women of the Middle Ages. Indeed, the direct experience of French women is obscured in the sources, which speak almost exclusively in a male voice. This problem of sources is not, of course, unique to churching. Still, to complete this study required casting a very wide net.

This study is focused on northern France because of the rich library and archival collections in that region and because the custom of churching was

especially strong in Normandy. I originally intended to examine churching in the early and high Middle Ages but found material from these periods to be thin or nonexistent. I have no doubt that customs of purification after childbirth were practiced earlier and more widely than the sources seem to suggest, but the paucity of evidence makes it difficult to describe these practices in much detail before the twelfth century. A full picture of the liturgical and social celebrations of churching in France is possible only in the fifteenth century.

Penitentials or early books of penance are the best sources of information about purification after childbirth in France during the early Middle Ages.[18] The custom of private penance and the use of penitentials in the administration of this practice arose in the Irish Church and were brought to the Continent around the end of the sixth century by Irish and Anglo-Saxon missionaries. By the eighth century, penitentials were being produced on the Continent. All of the penitentials used in this project as evidence of French practices are continental in origin and have a Frankish connection.[19] All are available in modern editions; the most important are those of Wasserschleben, Finsterwalder, Schmitz, and Bieler.

Many of the penitentials brought to or produced on the Continent did not have official sanction for the Western Church or even for the whole of a country.[20] Thus, aspects of church discipline reflected in the penitentials cannot be taken to indicate a uniform practice throughout the Frankish realm. On the other hand, some synods and individual prelates mandated that their priests have a copy of a penitential, suggesting that their use was supported and approved in these local regions. Furthermore, the numerous manuscripts and their wide circulation reveal the practical value of these books to the parish clergy who used them. Thus, while generalizations based on the penitentials must be made carefully, their widespread usage and local approval suggest a broader application than might be expected for works lacking official sanction.

The production, copying, and use of books of penance continued into the eleventh century. Late examples of the genre include the tenth-century penitential of Regino of Prüm and the *Corrector* in Burchard of Worms's *Decretum* (1007–15).[21] Ivo of Chartres included material from the penitentials in his twelfth-century work;[22] however, beginning in the thirteenth century, penitentials were largely replaced by confessors' manuals. This new form of penitential literature developed partly in response to a perceived need to convert the laity through preaching and confession.[23] The genre continued to develop and remained an important element in the ministry of penance through the fifteenth century. The confessors' manuals used in this study circulated within the French church, though not all were produced in France. A number of these exist only in manuscript or

incunabula but some important manuals for confessors are available in modern edition, including those of Robert of Flamborough, Peter of Poitiers, and Thomas of Chobham.

Penitential literature is especially helpful in uncovering clerical ideas about pollution and purification. A fuller understanding of clerical attitudes, however, can be found in more descriptive sources such as theological treatises and, especially, sermons. Preaching has always been part of the Christian tradition and was usually considered the best or at least a major tool for instructing and admonishing the laity.[24] A number of factors, including concerns about heresy and efforts at church reform, contributed to major developments in the tradition of preaching from the thirteenth century. As a result, the number of extant sermons from the thirteenth century increases considerably. Sermons thus provide a consistent and relatively abundant source for clerical attitudes toward churching, especially during the central and later Middle Ages.[25] Their didactic and hortatory nature, perhaps a disadvantage when using them as sources of social practice, make them quite valuable as reflections of clerical ideals and beliefs.

All of the sermons examined for this book were written by clerics who either lived in France or whose preaching would have been known in France. Although some sermon collections have been edited, such as those of Bernard of Clairvaux, most sermons used in this study are available only in manuscript. Two groups of sermons are especially appropriate as sources on churching: sermons written for the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary and *ad status* sermons directed at married couples. Even in these contexts, however, preachers rarely discussed churching directly. The purification of ordinary women is used only as a foil for the real point of the sermon, Mary's sinlessness and humility. Nevertheless, such arguments reveal clerical authors' perceptions of churching by the way they argue for Mary's freedom from the obligation to be churched. Women's purification, however, was not a major focus in any of the sermons except for one by Vincent Ferrer, which is discussed in chapter 3. *Ad status* sermons were directed at specific social groups, such as married couples, and addressed what the clergy believed to be the major duties and responsibilities of the group along with their most prevalent faults or temptations.[26] Whether the laity agreed with the ideas they were exposed to in such sermons is difficult to say, but the sermons are especially valuable as sources for the beliefs of the educated clergy regarding churching and its impact on the sexual lives of the married laity.

To recover the actual practice of churching in the medieval parish or local community requires an entirely different set of sources. Liturgical books provide us with the actual liturgy and are discussed at some length in chapter 4. In addition, synodal statutes (legislation issued by bishops) and

records from ecclesiastical courts charged with enforcing canon law are useful. These latter sources reveal the intentions and designs of the French bishops and also tell us something about the laity's cooperation with or resistance to ecclesiastical authority.

Bishops were guided in the exercise of their authority by canon law and papal decrees but could promulgate diocesan legislation shaped to meet their own particular needs and circumstances. Often, though not exclusively, this was done by issuing statutes at diocesan synods, obligatory meetings of all the clergy in the diocese designed to educate and control the local clergy, especially parish priests.[27] French diocesan assemblies date back to the sixth century but became more regular during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries with the rapid growth in the number of parishes and the increased need to instruct and discipline the growing number of often poorly educated clergy who staffed them. Because of the regularity of diocesan synods, especially after 1215, the statutes issued at these meetings provide a relatively abundant and consistent source for the episcopal regulation of churching. Many diocesan statutes have been edited, although the records of some synods are missing or incomplete.[28]

For the majority of medieval Christians, ecclesiastical authority was exercised through the bishop's court where breaches of canon law and local statutes, including those involving churching, were heard. These courts had developed during the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries into a separate institution known in France as the *officialité* and were presided over by a cleric trained in canon law and appointed directly by the bishop.[29] Although the records of episcopal courts are an important source for the history of churching, especially in terms of lay compliance with episcopal regulation of the rite, few are available before the very end of the Middle Ages. Methods of keeping records in the *officialité* developed gradually and took the form of official court registers only at the end of the fourteenth century.[30] Ecclesiastical court records for northern France are in manuscripts housed in departmental archives, with the exception of the records from the court at Cerisy, which have been edited.

All of the sources described above were produced by the clergy and express clerical ideas and beliefs. By far the most difficult task of this study was to find sources reflecting the views and practices of the laity, especially those of women. The one aspect of a churching celebration controlled and organized by the laity, however, was the family feast or *feste des relevailles*. The major source of information on these feasts is letters of remission from the Trésor des Chartes.[31] These were formal statements issued by the royal chancery in the name of the king, or sometimes the queen, granting pardon for a capital offense.[32] Over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the French royal chancery issued well over 40,000 letters of

remission, many of which are now housed in the Trésor des Chartes in the French National Archives.[33] Although references to churching feasts are relatively rare, the narrative character of the letters provides an especially valuable resource for the study of these events, which were an important part of the social life of many families in late medieval northern France.[34]

Letters of remission had a specific structure and purpose. They were collaborative efforts by the supplicant and an official scribe, usually a notary in the royal chancery, although supplicants with money could hire lawyers or agents for further assistance. The supplicant's purpose for writing the letter was to attain pardon for a capital crime, often murder.[35] In order to demonstrate that the murder was indeed pardonable, the body of the letter was a narrative in which the supplicant described, frequently in great detail, the circumstances surrounding the crime. It is here that we find references to churching feasts and the customs surrounding them.

Most letters were written in French, though a small number are in Latin. The narrative itself was in proper French without reflecting local dialect, probably due to the editing of the scribe, though it often included direct quotes that retain the colloquial language of the supplicants themselves. This personal language may account for the variety of terms used to describe churching feasts and other events surrounding childbirth. The term *feste des relevailles* is commonly used to refer to a churching feast though some letters use *feste de gesine*. I consider these two terms as synonymous.

Some scholars have understood the word *gesine* as a reference to childbed and consequently made a distinction between the *feste de gesine* and the *feste des relevailles*. *Gesine* comes from the old French verb *gesir*, which means to give birth or to be in childbed. The modern *gésir*, meaning to lie helplessly, is related to this meaning. The related Latin term, *gesina*, meant childbirth (*puerperium*) but was also used to refer to the celebration at a woman's churching, that is to a *feste des relevailles*.[36] In his work on folklore in France during the Hundred Years' War, Roger Vaultier understood the term *feste de gesine* as a festive gathering during a woman's lying-in, that is, while she remained in childbed. He distinguished this from the *feste des relevailles*, which he understood as referring to the family feast given on the day of her churching.[37] Some letters of remission, however, make it clear that the term *gesine* could refer to a churching feast. The letter of remission for John Grosparmi, for example, states that John was at home where he "*faisoit bonne chiere avec pluseurs de ses amis, qui là estoient assemblez pour raison de la feste et gesine de sa femme, qui avoit esté acouchée d'enfant et relevée ce jour.*"[38] In other texts, the term *gesine* clearly refers to childbirth and not to the churching feast. In my reading of the letters of remission, then, I have translated the word *gesine* variously depending upon the context.

Beyond the descriptions of family feasts in letters of remission, visual representations of churching provide insight into the laity's understanding of this celebration. A large number of such images are found in books of hours, a form of religious devotion that became popular among the bourgeoisie in the late Middle Ages. All of the illuminations examined for this study, and discussed more fully in chapter 6, are from books intended for use in the north of France, though not necessarily produced in that region, and all are housed in libraries located in northern France.[39]

The discussion of churching presented in the pages that follow relies on this collection of sources, supplemented with anecdotes from literature, chronicles, and cartularies. Further exploration of such anecdotal sources may prove fruitful for future studies of churching. Cartularies, in particular, are a rich possibility for more information about medieval churching. Personal family accounts, known as *livre de raison*, may also prove helpful in exploring the early modern practice in France. There is clearly more that could be done to uncover the medieval practices of churching in other regions of France as well as other countries. I make no claim to having the last word on this subject. Rather, I see this book as a beginning and hope that it will encourage others to continue the work of expanding our knowledge of churching in the Middle Ages.

CHAPTER 1

CUM LUMINE ET OBLATIONE: THE ORIGINS OF CHURCHING IN FRANCE

Early in the spring of 875, around the first week of Lent, Charles the Bald arrived at the monastery of Saint-Denis, where he stayed until after the celebration of Easter. His pregnant wife, Richildis, was with him. But one night in the week before Easter, the queen had a miscarriage (*aborsu*). She gave birth to a son who was baptized and soon died. After Easter, Charles resumed his royal peregrinations. Richildis, however, remained at the monastery waiting for the day of her purification after childbirth.[1] Exactly what Richildis did when her day of purification arrived the chronicler did not say. The record makes it clear, however, that by the last quarter of the ninth century a custom of purification after childbirth, even if the child did not survive, was known among the Franks.

How purification after childbirth came to be a practice for Richildis and other Frankish women is not clear. While scholars have begun to explore the various meanings of churching in the late medieval and early modern worlds, they have made little progress in tracing the origins of this European tradition. Yet, the roots of churching in Christian practice are key to understanding the rite, its longevity, and its wide appeal. Considering its beginnings allows us to see how it changed over time and what such changes meant to the women and men of the Middle Ages. The liturgical rite of churching in France developed gradually over many centuries and was rooted in a complex set of ideas including Mosaic prescriptions for cultic purity, early medieval notions of pollution, and the customs of Germanic women and their families. How widely these ideas were accepted is difficult to determine and there is no clear evidence of a ritualized response to them until the ninth century. By then, new mothers in some regions of France had a custom of coming to church about a month after the birth of a child bringing a candle and an offering. Indeed, Richildis

may have brought her candle and offering to the monastery church of Saint-Denis. Between the ninth and the twelfth century, the rite developed as a part of parish responsibilities. Tracing this development is the purpose of this first chapter.

When discussing the origins of churching, scholars generally turn to two passages from the Hebrew Scriptures that contain purity codes for women experiencing a flow of blood. Leviticus 15, which deals with women during their menstrual periods, and Leviticus 12, which deals with women after childbirth. Leviticus 15 describes all the ways that contact with a menstrual woman produces pollution, including having intercourse (Lev. 15.24).[2] The prohibitions and restrictions placed on menstrual women are applied to postpartal women in Leviticus 12, which states:

> And the Lord said to Moses: say to the children of Israel that a woman who, having received the seed of man, gives birth to a male will be kept separate like a menstrual woman for seven days and on the eighth day the child will be circumcised. For thirty-three days the woman will remain in the blood of her purification: she should not touch anything sacred nor come into the sanctuary until the days of her purification are completed. If however she gives birth to a female she will be unclean for two weeks as in the manner for a flow of menstrual blood and she will remain in the blood of her purification for sixty-six days. And when the days of her purification for a son or a daughter have been completed she shall bring a one year old lamb as an offering. . .[3]

According to Mosaic law, then, a new mother must refrain from intercourse with her husband and avoid sacred places and objects until the period of purification had passed. This period lasts forty days if the mother bears a son and eighty days if she has a daughter. At the end of this period of separation, the new mother is to come to the priest with an offering in order to complete her purification.

Virtually every scholar who writes about churching notes the connection of the Christian practice to these passages from the Mosaic law. Many accept this connection as an explanation for the origins of the rite. Peter Rushton, for example, states that churching "probably derived from the Jewish rites of purification specified in Leviticus 12."[4] In a similar vein, Gail McMurray Gibson refers to the text of Leviticus as "the Old Testament type and exemplar of the continuing, prescribed, and noninclusionary medieval rite of churching."[5] William Coster goes further. He adds to Leviticus a reference to the story of Mary's purification in Luke 2 and then explains, with considerable assurance, that "[t]hese biblical precedents led to the adoption of such ceremonies into the western liturgy around the

eleventh century."[6] All of these comments are quite isolated and are not part of any extended attempt to discuss the origins of churching, yet the authors seem satisfied with this straightforward biblical connection.

Susan Karant-Nunn offers a more elaborate though no more convincing argument, which draws on the traditional celebration of Candlemas. She explores the iconographic representations of the Purification of Mary and gives an example of a fifteenth-century painting in which the scene of Mary at the Temple "bears a close resemblance to actual Candlemas and churching practices in north European late Middle Ages."[7] She then provides a brief history of Candlemas and concludes that the "evolution of Candlemas is closely related to that replication of Mary's penitential act that we call churching."[8] Karant-Nunn seems to be suggesting that churching and Candlemas went through a parallel development or, perhaps, that churching developed out of Candlemas. She offers no indication of what such development would entail and no actual evidence to support her statement.

None of these explanations is adequate. Certainly, the custom of churching in France required a woman to stay away from church after the birth of her child, a requirement that at first seems similar to the code in Leviticus 12. But, as we shall see, the differences between medieval practice and the Mosaic law are considerable both in language and in content. Early medieval practices of separation may have been influenced by the codes in Leviticus, but they were not simply an adoption of Jewish custom. Furthermore, the notions of separation found in the penitentials did not themselves remain unaltered but were shaped and adapted as time passed. By the later Middle Ages, for example, the common practice in France was for women to wait about a month before coming for purification. The strict stipulation of "forty days and forty nights" seen in some penitentials had been relaxed. Thus, churching, a complex practice, cannot be adequately explained simply by citing Leviticus. Neither can churching be explained by linking it to the celebration of Candlemas. Although there were definite associations between the two in the minds of medieval people, our understanding of the Latin roots and medieval evolution of Candlemas is sketchy. Explaining churching as a development of the feast tells us virtually nothing about the origins of churching in Europe.

The only author to have made a serious attempt to define the origins of churching in the West is Adolph Franz, although his explanation is obscured by his habit of confusing his evidence both chronologically and geographically. In his discussion of the origins of churching in the West, he frequently discusses material from the Greek-speaking world, Germany, and France all in the same paragraph, at the same time leaping from the first century to the sixteenth. He is not actually presenting an argument but rather a set of "facts" from which he seems to draw a conclusion. This is

not particularly convincing but his effort, for all its shortcomings, is the most coherent of any previously presented by a scholar.

Franz placed his discussion on the origins of churching within the context of the blessing a woman received on her first visit back to church after having a child, that is, the section dealing with the liturgical rite of churching.[9] He began with the two texts from Leviticus 12 and 15 concerning women with a flow of blood. He drew on a number of sources to demonstrate that the Mosaic prohibition against menstrual women entering sacred space was introduced into the Eastern Church in the first or second century. These ideas, he claimed, influenced the Latin Church. As proof, he cited the penitential of Theodore, which imposed a three-week penance on any woman who entered a church while menstruating.

"Parallel with this," he states, "was also the regulation about women in childbirth."[10] The purity code regarding women after childbirth found in Leviticus 12, Franz argues, was part of the Eastern Church and, from there, it came to the West. He bases this claim on the Canons of Hippolytus, a type of early church manual written to provide disciplinary and liturgical rules for the early Christian community, and, again, on the penitentials. It was because of Greek influence on the West that penitentials, such as that of Theodore, included a punishment for new mothers who came into church before being purified. Franz's argument, then, is that churching can be explained by early Christian adoption of the Mosaic codes of Leviticus and that it appeared in the West because of the influence of the Eastern Church.

This suggestion, although more convincing, is also unsatisfactory. Franz states that the separation of women after childbirth was a practice in the Eastern church and he bases this claim on the Canons of Hippolytus.[11] The Canons stated that a new mother should be kept away from church for forty days after the birth of a son and eighty days after the birth of a daughter.[12] This stipulation is identical to the Mosaic purity codes found in Leviticus 12:1–8, and it is likely that this prohibition was borrowed from the Hebrew Scriptures. However, in the same canon (number 18) a midwife was prohibited from receiving communion for twenty days after assisting at the birth of a boy and forty days after assisting at the birth of a girl. This stipulation is not found in Leviticus, which suggests that the Canons of Hippolytus, though influenced by Mosaic purity codes, were not simply a repetition of Jewish customs.

The Canons of Hippolytus, moreover, are a problematic source. The date of the original text has been debated and, more importantly, the extent of its circulation is questionable. Scholars now consider the original Greek text, which is lost, to have been composed around the mid-fourth century, sometime between 336 and 363.[13] Previous scholars dated the Canons to as

early as the second or as late as the sixth century.[14] The dating of the Canons was still being disputed in the early twentieth century when Franz was writing and he may have been working under the assumption that they were much older than they actually are. He cited the work of H. Achelis who argued that the Canons were the oldest work of Hippolytus and served as the basis for all later works ascribed to him, including the influential text known as the *Apostolic Tradition*.[15] We now know that none of this is accurate.

More problematic in the present context, however, is the question of how widely the Canons of Hippolytus circulated. The original Greek was produced in Egypt as an adaptation of the *Apostolic Tradition*, an earlier work ascribed to Hippolytus that does not contain any reference to women staying away from church after childbirth. This idea was, apparently, an addition to the text made in Egypt. The Canons were subsequently translated into Arabic and Coptic. The number of these various vernacular versions suggests that the Canons had a fairly wide circulation in the Egyptian and Ethiopian Churches during the fifth and sixth centuries. There is no indication that they circulated in the other major centers of the Greek Church and no evidence for any knowledge or use of them in the Latin Church. Taking all of this into consideration, it is safe to say that the practice of women staying away from church after childbirth was current in Egypt and Ethiopia by the fourth century but not necessarily in the Western Church. Thus, Franz's argument, based as it was on inaccurate information, falls apart on closer examination. In fact, all of these efforts to explain churching in the West are limited by the inadequacy of our sources. Nevertheless, the question of how churching came to be practiced in the West must be given a more complex answer than that offered by previous scholars.

Part of this complexity comes from the connection of churching to Jewish customs. Medieval clerics certainly connected the idea that Christian women were impure after childbirth and required some kind of purification to the purity codes expressed in the Hebrew Scriptures. The Mosaic notion of impurity, however, was not quite the same as that expressed by medieval Christian clerics. According to traditional interpretations of Mosaic restrictions, Jewish concepts of impurity connected with menstrual or postpartal blood do not appear to have been based on a belief that women in these conditions were guilty of any moral imperfection. Passages in the Hebrew Scriptures about women's blood pollution, specifically Leviticus 12:1–8 and 15:19–30, indicate that contact with menstrual blood created an obstacle to participation in ritual. As stated earlier, these passages equated pollution after childbirth with menstrual pollution; they caused similar kinds of impurity and both required the same kind of purification.

During menstruation and after childbirth a woman suffered from a cultic impurity that made her ritually impure and unfit to participate in the cultic life of the community.[16] During such times she was prohibited from entering the Temple or touching sacred objects. She was not allowed intercourse with her husband and he was to avoid contact with her as much as possible lest he, too, become ritually impure. The impurity caused by both forms of bleeding was resolved by a period of separation that ended by bringing an offering to the Temple.

Feminist scholars, unsatisfied with the explanation of Mosaic law solely in terms of cultic purity, have probed more deeply and found that notions of impurity were highly gendered. Judith Romney Wegner points out that Leviticus warns against a man lying with an unclean woman but says nothing about a woman lying with an unclean man because "the only pollution that matters is the contamination of male by female."[17] The purpose of Mosaic regulations regarding women's uncleanness, she concludes, was to ensure the ritual purity of Jewish men, not of the women themselves. Nancy Jay notes that among the ancient Israelites, the pollution of menstruation and childbirth typified pollution in general; thus the menstrual woman was a symbol of all that was unclean.[18]

Feminist scholars have also considered how Biblical notions of menstrual blood and impurity were incorporated into rabbinical Judaism, the dominant form of Judaism throughout the Middle Ages. Rachel Biale argues that after the destruction of the Temple, the purity codes were reinterpreted. Whereas they were originally intended to protect the Temple, they were later understood as a means of protecting purity within the family.[19] Although this development began in the Talmudic period, Biale argues that it continued to develop throughout the Middle Ages. In contrast to Wegner, then, Biale believes that the Mosaic purity codes served to maintain proper sexual relations between husband and wife.[20]

Lawrence Hoffman, following the work of Nancy Jay, has a very different perspective. He points out that while the Rabbis understood male blood shed in the rite of circumcision as salvific, they approached women's blood with fear and loathing.[21] The Rabbis developed this notion of blood based upon a gendered worldview in which the male virtues of order and self-control reflected holiness whereas disorder and lack of control reflected the opposite.[22] Within this system, women, whose bleeding is free and uncontrolled, "are innately wild like their blood; they are beyond self-control."[23] Moreover, according to Judith Baskin, the Rabbis did not understand the menstrual proscriptions as "divine commandments whose observance enhances the religious life of the observer and assures divine favor" but rather eternal punishments placed on women to remind them of Eve's responsibility in the death of Adam and, thus, in all human mortality.[24]

Indeed, the Rabbis surrounded menstrual and postpartal bleeding with an elaborate set of regulations directed at Jewish women who were thus made responsible for protecting the men with whom they interacted from accidental contamination by contact with these substances.[25] For example, they instituted an additional day of premenstrual impurity and required that women check themselves carefully before intercourse to avoid accidents. The number of impure days was, also, increased from seven, for the menses itself, to fourteen by adding seven days of impurity after the menses.[26] Using the Scriptures as their authority, the Rabbis of medieval Europe worried about women's impurity only insofar as it affected men.

Rabbinical conceptions of male and female blood, like the theological arguments of medieval clerics, were shared by a small, elite circle of men. How much they affected the lives of Jewish women during the Middle Ages is unclear. Hoffman argues that sometime in the fourteenth century rabbinical beliefs about blood resulted in the exclusion of mothers from the circumcision rituals of their sons, and he also acknowledges that the associations made by the rabbinic elite were probably unknown to the ordinary Jew.[27] Thus, in spite of such negative associations and repercussions, how medieval Jewish women understood or experienced their periodic uncleanness is impossible to say.

By the first century of the Christian era, the rite of purification for Jewish women also included bathing in a *mikveh*, a facility for ritual bathing constructed and operated according to Talmudic specifications. Archeological evidence from the city of Herodium, built around 40 B.C.E. and occupied by a Jewish community until at least 70 C.E., reveals that the city had a *mikveh* used for ritual purification of all sorts including the purification of women after childbirth. Rabbinical teaching continually reaffirmed the need for and practice of ritual purity according to the Mosaic law and purification in a *mikveh* was part of medieval Jewish custom and practice.

Modern Jewish women, however, do not universally surround this practice with negative connotations. Blu Greenberg, who writes about traditional Jewish life from a woman's point of view, describes her own experience of *mikveh* not as a move from impure to pure but rather as a ritual that enhances her own purity in anticipation of renewing her sexual life with her husband.[28] For her, the practice serves to mark intercourse as a sacred and honored aspect of her marriage. The periodic abstinence from sexual activity required by Jewish law and ended by ritual bathing in the *mikveh* heightens the value as well as the pleasure of intercourse. According to one of Greenberg's friends, each time she steps out of the *mikveh* she feels like a new bride.[29] On the other hand, Rachel Biale argues that for some women the laws regulating marital relations make sex impersonal by

severely restricting spontaneity.[30] We cannot assume, of course, that such contemporary perceptions reflect the experience of Jewish women in biblical times or in medieval France. They do serve, however, to remind us that the meaning and experience of purification is quite personal, complex, and not necessarily negative. They also indicate the need to be cautious in explaining how early Christians incorporated this complex set of ideas and beliefs into their own ritual practice.

Presumably, some early Christians (the "Judaizers") maintained Jewish purification practices for a while. However, to my knowledge, there is no evidence that the early church practiced similar customs until, perhaps, the fourth-century Canons of Hippolytus. More solid documentation that can clearly be linked to the western Church comes only from the early seventh century. There is ample evidence, however, that many Christian writers regarded sexual activity in general and childbirth in particular as polluting during the first five centuries of Christianity.

The early centuries of the Christian church were, indeed, a time of considerable turmoil concerning attitudes toward the body and sexuality. During the first and second centuries of the Christian era, many extreme ideas about sexual renunciation developed. In the areas of the Eastern Church, Palestine, Syria, and parts of Asia Minor, so many itinerant, radical preachers proclaimed their version of militant Christianity during this period that Peter Brown has dubbed it the "Burned Over" region of the early church.[31] Marcion, for example, called all of his followers to a life of celibacy. Preaching around the middle of the second century, he exhorted the members of his church to renounce married life in order to escape the oppression of this world and gain the freedom of spirit made available through Christ.[32] But it was not only in the East that these ideas flourished. Tertullian, writing from North Africa in the late second and early third century, taught that "abstinence from sex was the most effective technique to achieve clarity of soul."[33] Like Marcion, he eventually rejected marriage altogether. He urged his wife to do the same and argued that sexual desire, even in marriage, had no place in Christian life.[34]

Such radical beliefs, though not the norm nor the policy of the official Church, were part of a wider discourse on sexuality that accepted sexual activity in marriage as necessary, perhaps even capable of some good, but at the same time was often permeated with distrust of the body and its passions. Origen (185–253/55), a bishop of Alexandria, believed that the intimacy, loyalty, and ordered hierarchy of marriage were symbolic of redeemed creation. He nevertheless remained suspicious of marriage since intercourse, he argued, coarsened the spirit.[35] For Cyprian, bishop of Carthage from 248 to 258, real Christian holiness was a kind of prolonged martyrdom that came from facing and enduring the dangers of daily life,

the temptations to anger, jealousy, and pride that assaulted the flesh constantly. In the writings of Cyprian, Peter Brown notes, "the control of sexuality was merely one example—and not a very prominent one—of the Christian's need to control a body subjected to the huge pains of the world."[36] For men like Origen and Cyprian, the passionate and sensual body represented an obstacle to be overcome, a force to be mastered and restrained. Within this atmosphere, women's bodies presented a particularly powerful source of temptation. Origen, for example, believed that women were more lustful than men, that they were obsessed by sexual desire and, therefore, he considered them a primary source of carnal corruption in Christian society.[37]

In the minds of some Church Fathers, women's reproductive organs and the process of childbirth were especially dirty and disgusting. The response of Jerome (340–419) to Helvidius is one example of such attitudes. Helvidius, a Christian layman, wanted to assert equality between the married and celibate states. He wrote a tract in which he tried to prove that although Mary had been a virgin when she conceived Jesus, she had married after the birth and borne several more children. Jerome's answer to Helvidius included a list of the many trials of marriage and a description of childbirth. He wrote:

> Add to this, if you please, other insults of nature: a swelling womb for nine months, the nausea, the birth, the blood, the swaddling cloth. The infant itself presented to you with the usual covering of membranes wrapped around it. Infants placed in a hard crib, the wailing of little ones, circumcision on the eighth day, the time of purgation so that it/she be proven impure.[38]

Jerome depicted childbirth as a disgusting affair marked by unpleasantness and impurity. Some of his contemporaries expressed similar ideas. Augustine (354–430) described the womb as a prison and Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 345–410) compared it to a cesspool.[39] Such approaches no doubt reflected a male point of view and a misogynistic attitude toward women's concerns. Jerome's understanding of the period of purification as proof of the impurity of childbirth or, perhaps, of the mother's impurity, rather than as a remedy to this condition, is interesting, though it may indicate nothing more than his own prejudices. It certainly does not prove the presence or absence of a practice of purification after childbirth in the late-fourth-century Church.

Frustrating as it may be, there is no information about practices of purification for new mothers in the Western Church before the early seventh century. How Christian rituals developed during the chaotic and

intensely missionary period between the fourth and seventh centuries is unclear. The tendency of Christian missionaries to syncretically adopt pagan customs whenever possible, an idea that is explored more fully later, no doubt had an impact on ritual and liturgy. The need to respond to local situations and the difficulty in communicating across increasingly unregulated territories as the Roman world gave way to the early Middle Ages must also have ensured that ritual customs evolved in distinct and various ways. Later developments indicate, however, that ideas about the polluting effects of menstruation and childbirth and women's need for purification spread to some regions of the Western Church during this period.

The earliest solid evidence for a Western custom of women staying away from church after childbirth comes from the response of Pope Gregory I to Archbishop Augustine of Canterbury written around the year 600. Theodore, working in the distant English missions, had written to Gregory asking for advice. How long, Augustine asked, must a woman wait after having a child before she can enter a church? Gregory offered a thoughtful reply.

> You know by the teachings of the Old Testament that she should keep away for thirty-three days if the child is a boy and sixty-six days if it is a girl. This, however, must be understood figuratively. For if she enters the church even at the very hour of her delivery, for the purpose of giving thanks, she is not guilty of any sin: it is the pleasure of the flesh, not its pain, which is at fault. But it is in the intercourse of the flesh that the pleasure lies; for in bringing forth the infant there is pain. . . .So if we forbid a woman who has been delivered to enter the church, we reckon her punishment as a sin.[40]

Gregory's response shows that he accepted the notion of women's pollution though he located it in intercourse rather than the process of birth. If she is to be prohibited from entering the church, Gregory argued, it should be because of the sin of lust and pleasure during intercourse, not because of the pain or bleeding associated with giving birth. Thus Gregory's understanding of the custom differed significantly from the concerns and prescriptions found in Leviticus. Gregory was more concerned with morality than with cultic purity. There is also no hint in the letter that these two churchmen were discussing a novelty. Both of them seem to have been familiar with the custom of women staying away from church; Theodore's question was how this should be enforced among the English.

The correspondence between Augustine and Gregory indicates that a custom of women refraining from entering a church after childbirth was known in some regions of the Western Church by the late sixth or early seventh century. Evidence for the existence of this custom and others

related to the development of churching among the Franks can be found in the penitentials, which are the first sources to offer more than isolated comments or directives concerning issues of purity. Notions of blood pollution and purification after childbirth in the penitentials indicate a variety of ideas coexisting in different regions of the Frankish realm. These various customs and ideas laid the groundwork for the later ritual of churching in France.

Impurity in the penitentials is largely connected with two sources: contaminated food and sexual activity. The penitential of Theodore, for example, imposed a forty-day penance on anyone eating unclean meat (*carnem immundam*), required the purification (*purgetur et asparagatur*) of food contaminated by a mouse or a weasel, and stated that anyone who knowingly ate food polluted by blood and any unclean thing (*sanguine vel quocunque immundo polluitur*) must do penance according to the degree of the pollution (*juxta modum pollutionis*).[41] Although these prescriptions may have been related to health concerns, they also make it clear that particular kinds of contamination, contact with mice and blood for example, were considered polluting and required purification. Such prescriptions also operated out of a concept of pollution as contact with certain proscribed substances rather than as moral impurity.

Notions of impurity in the penitentials, however, were most often related to sexual matters, which sometimes carried a moral dimension.[42] Seminal emission, either nocturnal, involuntary, or as a result of sexual arousal, was described as pollution; however, the penance for involuntary pollution was lighter. Cummean's penitential, for example, required a monk who willingly polluted himself during sleep (*in somnis voluntate pullutus est*) to immediately get up and sing nine psalms on his knees and to spend the next day on bread and water as a penance. If the pollution was unintentional (*pullutus sine voluntate*), the monk was to sing fifteen psalms.[43] Boys who polluted themselves while kissing a girl (*osculum. . .cum coinquinamento*) were given a penance of ten special fasts,[44] and priests who polluted themselves (*coinquinatus*) by touching or kissing a woman were to do penance for forty days.[45] Thus, while seminal emission was polluting in itself, pollution accompanied by moral culpability generated a heavier penance. This attitude may account for the harsh penance of bread and water for 120 days prescribed in the *Hubertense* penitential for a man who entered a church without washing after having sexual intercourse with his wife.[46] His actions endangered the purity of sacred space for sexual intercourse presumably included both the contamination of seminal emission and the sin of lustful pleasure.

The origin of churching in France, however, is more clearly connected with sexual proscriptions related to the idea of blood as a source of pollution. Many Frankish penitentials, for example, required a penance for having

intercourse with a woman during her menstrual period.[47] Canons that called for a time of sexual abstinence after childbirth seem to express the same concern. An early example of this can be found in the penitential *Floriacense* (ca. 775–800), which stated that a woman should abstain from intercourse for forty days after the birth of a child.[48] This same exhortation was repeated in a number of other penitentials during the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries: the *Capitula judicorum* (eighth century), the *Sangallense tripartite* (ca. 800), the *Casinense* (ninth/tenth century), and the *Vallicellanum* (ninth/tenth century).[49] Because these sexual prohibitions were directly linked to concerns about contact with blood, the danger of contamination faded when a woman's bleeding, either menstrual or postpartal, had ceased. In the case of intercourse after childbirth, the canons usually prescribed abstinence for forty days. Canons such as these indicate that notions of impurity after childbirth based on contamination by contact with blood were current in the Frankish realm from at least the eighth century. These penitentials imagine an ideal of avoiding contact with menstrual or postpartal blood. If reality did not match this ideal, they required a penance but made no specific reference to purification.

Other penitentials, however, make it quite clear that, in some regions of France, a notion of purification was known at this time. In some cases, purification cleared the way for the resumption of sexual intercourse. The *Martenianum* (early ninth century), for example, stated that, after a woman has given birth, her husband should not be intimate with her until the time of purification has passed (*nisi tempus purgationis transierit*).[50] The *Bigotianum* (700–725) and the penitential of Haltigar (817–830) directed a man to abstain from intercourse with his wife from three months after the time of conception until after the period of purgation (*post tempore purgationis*), that is, forty days and nights.[51] The *Arundel* (tenth or eleventh century), similarly, prescribed forty days of penance for a man who had intercourse with his wife before her postpartal blood purification (*post partum ante sanguinis purgationem*).[52] In a few cases, the penitential not only prohibited intercourse before purification but also restricted a woman's freedom to enter a church. The *Remense* (ca. 850), for example, required that a woman do three weeks of penance if, having borne a child, she entered the church before being cleansed of postpartal bleeding (*ante mundum sanguinem post partum*).[53] The *Parisiense* (ca. 750), the *Excarpsus Cummeani* (eighth century), the *Martenianum* (ninth century), and the *Pseudo-Theodore* (ninth century) all included a similar prohibition.[54]

The language of the canons dealing with postpartal pollutions suggests a further nuance to the understanding of these prohibitions. The requirement for a period of abstinence after childbirth is usually directed at married mothers, whereas the prohibition against entering a church seems to apply

to all mothers, whether married or not. The connection to marriage is suggested by the use of the verb *nupserit*, which is related to the terms for marriage *nuptus* and *nuptiae*. It was generally used to refer to marital intercourse, as opposed to intercourse more broadly defined.[55] In the thirteen penitentials that referred to sexual intercourse after childbirth, all used the term *nupserit* except four: the *Bigotianum*, the *Haltigar*, the *Arundel*, and the *Martenianum*.

The *Bigotianum* and the *Haltigar*, however, make clear the connection between sexual abstinence after childbirth and marriage by placing the canon in a chapter whose title made the link with marriage explicit, *De continentia matrimonii* in the *Bigotianum* and *De questionibus conjugiorum* in the *Haltigar*.[56] The other two canons in these sections also dealt with times when married couples should observe sexual abstinence: three days before the reception of communion and forty days after Easter. The context of the canons in the *Martenianum*, as we shall see, also makes it clear that the requirement for abstinence after childbirth was thought of in terms of married women.

Although the *Arundel* also included a canon (#57) prohibiting intercourse after childbirth, it is not clear that this was directed at married women. Rather than using *nupserit*, the *Arundel* used the word *coierit*, a more general term for intercourse.[57] In addition, the canon was placed in a section of the penitential, *De fornicatione et adulterio et ejus penitentia*, that dealt with a variety of sexual matters, including fornication, incest, and the sin of lust, as well as matters related to married couples. Further, the canon did not use the word for wife (*uxor*) but rather referred generally to a woman (*femina*) although other canons in the same section referred specifically to wives. Canon 54, for example, imposed a penance of forty days on a wife (*uxor*) who mixed the blood or semen of her husband in food and ate it as a love potion.[58] Thus it is not clear in this penitential that sexual abstinence before postpartal purification was considered a matter for married women. In this case, it might have applied to all mothers regardless of their marital status.

Three of the five penitentials that prohibit new mothers from entering church, the *Parisiense, Excarpsus Cummeani*, and *Remense*, seem to apply restrictions on sexual intercourse to married women. The prohibition against entering a church, however, applied to all women. They used nearly identical wording apparently borrowed from the seventh-century Anglo-Saxon penitential attributed to Theodore of Canterbury.[59] The *Parisiense*, for example, states:

> Canon 119: Women, neither nuns nor lay women, should not enter a church and should not take communion during the time of menstruation; if they presume to do this, they should do penance for three weeks.

> Canon 120: Similarly, those who enter a church before the cleansing of post partal blood should do penance for 40 days.
> Canon 121: Also those who have marital relations (*nupserit*) at these times should do penance for 20 days.[60]

The juxtaposition of these canons makes them somewhat unclear. "Similarly" in the second canon may refer to the penance imposed in the previous canon although three weeks is not the same as forty days. More probably, it refers to the women involved, suggesting that no woman, whether a nun or a laywoman, ought to enter church before a period of postpartal cleansing. The use if the verb *nupserit* in the third canon, however, clearly suggests that married couples were expected to abstain from intercourse during this postpartal period. The placement of these canons in the penitentials does not offer any clarification since all three books included them in sections that were not especially concerned with married couples but that dealt with a variety of sexual sins.

The *Martenianum* implied a similar distinction although the text in this penitential is unusual since it borrowed heavily from a passage in the text of Gregory's letter to Augustine. In this passage, Gregory complained:

> an evil custom has arisen among married people that women scorn to suckle the children they have borne; and this presumably has arisen solely as a result of incontinence. . . . And so those women who in accordance with this evil custom hand over their children to others to be nourished must not have intercourse with their husbands until the time of purification has passed.[61]

Quoting Gregory, the author of the penitential clearly assumed that the mothers involved in this situation would be married women and that a period of abstinence after childbirth was required of married couples.[62] The admonition to stay away from church, which we have already seen, used less specific language that could apply to any new mother, married or not.[63] Of the five penitentials that prohibited women from entering church, only the *Pseudo-Theodore*, a Frankish work compiled around 830/847 under the influence of the Carolingian reforms,[64] placed both of the canons dealing with women after childbirth in the section *De observatione conjugatorum*, and, in addition, used the verb *nupserit* when referring to intercourse after childbirth.[65]

The apparent distinction between prohibitions for married mothers and those for all mothers, regardless of marital status, reflects the church's limited ability to define and control marriage during the early Middle Ages. Official teaching on sexual matters for the laity considered intercourse appropriate only between husband and wife. The social reality, however,

was different. The sexual use of slave women and the ability of high-status men to have a wife plus one or more concubines meant that unmarried mothers were not uncommon. Canons setting penances for men who violated consecrated women suggests another situation in which an unmarried woman, even a nun, might become a mother.[66] The penitentials, which were designed above all for practical use, included the ecclesiastical ideal of intercourse between married couples but also the reality of cultic impurity posed by all mothers. This practical approach offered the broadest possible defense against blood pollution, protecting both individual men and sacred space, while also reflecting the clerical ideal of lay sexuality.

Finally, there is one penitential that provides a tantalizing glimpse of a postpartal purification ritual in the ninth century. The *Pseudo-Theodore* stated that following the forty-day period of sexual abstinence after childbirth "a woman should come to church with a candle and an offering."[67] This brief phrase, unique in the continental penitentials, indicates that a woman's return to church after childbirth was ritually marked with a candle and an offering. It may well be that this was the ritual Richildis, whose baby died almost immediately after birth, awaited on the day of her purification in the spring of 875. If the offering she brought was intended for the priest, a custom reminiscent of Leviticus 12, perhaps she gave it in thanksgiving or out of obligation for some blessing or rite of purification that he performed. Carrying a lighted candle, as we shall see, was connected with the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. Perhaps these women of the ninth century who came to church bearing gifts and carrying lighted candles were the first French women to enjoy a ritual celebration of purification. Perhaps they are only the first ones we hear about. In either case, the comment serves only to tease and pique our curiosity for consistent references to an actual ritual of purification for new mothers in France come only in the twelfth century.

Taking into consideration, then, all the penitential canons dealing with women after childbirth, we can return to the question of the origins of churching. It is clear that clerical belief in a woman's impurity after childbirth existed in at least some regions of northern France during the eighth century. The impurity, like that of a menstrual woman, was caused by blood pollution although how or why contact with blood caused pollution is not stated.[68] Some texts responded to this impurity by requiring a period of sexual abstinence after childbirth. When the texts specified the duration of this period, they described it as lasting forty days, or forty days and nights, regardless of the sex of the child. In fact, the penitentials pay no attention to the child. As in the case of Richildis, purification was an issue for the mother; the survival or death of the child was not a consideration. It is possible that in some regions, a woman's impurity was resolved simply

by a forty-day period of separation. Other texts indicate, however, that a woman needed some form of purification to resolve her impurity before she was allowed to resume intercourse and, in a few cases, before she could enter a church. Moreover, the majority of penitentials applied the restrictions on intercourse after childbirth to married mothers while the prohibition against entering a church was applied to all mothers. Finally in the ninth century, one penitential offers the first glimpse of a postpartal ritual. New mothers in some regions of the Frankish realm were required to wait forty days after bearing a child and then, coming to church for the first time, to bring with them a candle and an offering. How widespread these beliefs were among the clergy and whether lay women and men held the same beliefs is not clear. Given the fragmented reality of the early medieval world, it is most likely that beliefs and customs varied considerably among both clergy and laity. But clearly, the roots of the French custom of churching were established during the early Middle Ages, beginning as early as the eighth century.

The reference to candles in the *Pseudo-Theodore* suggests a connection between the ninth-century custom and the Marian feast of Candlemas, a feast connected biblically and ritually with the medieval rite of churching. Before leaving this earlier period and turning to the twelfth century, then, it will be useful to consider briefly the history of Candlemas. This was the popular term for the feast of Mary's purification, based on the Scriptural passage in Luke 2:22–32. According to the Gospel story, the Virgin Mary, following the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law set out in Leviticus, brought her son to the Temple and there made an offering to complete her purification. Luke's account includes the meeting between Simeon and Jesus during which the old man recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel and the light of the nations.

By the late fourth century, the Eastern Church was commemorating this event, known as the *Hypapante* or the meeting between Simeon and the infant Jesus, with a festival held in Jerusalem during February.[69] In the sixth century, under the influence of Justinian, the date of the feast was set as February 2 and the celebration spread beyond Jerusalem, throughout the Eastern Roman Empire. It had probably been introduced at Rome somewhat earlier, perhaps during the late fifth century.

The Roman feast was named the Purification of the Virgin Mary and probably replaced the pagan feast of Lupercalia, which, in spite of papal disapproval, was still being celebrated each year on February 14. The substitution of the Feast of the Purification for Lupercalia is usually credited to Pope Gelasius I if only because the liturgy of the Purification was included in the Gelasian Sacramentary. At the end of the seventh century, Pope Sergius I added a candlelight procession to the events of the Roman

feast. By that time, the Feast of the Purification was apparently known outside of Rome since Bede referred to it as well as to the practice of carrying lighted candles.[70] In the ninth century, the custom of blessing the candles used in the procession became common and, consequently, the feast became known as Candlemas in English, *la Chandeleur* in French.

Exactly when the practice developed of women carrying lighted candles when they came for purification after childbirth is not known. The reference in the *Pseudo-Theodore* to women coming "with a candle and an offering" suggests that the association between candles and women's purification was already current in the Frankish realm by the first half of the ninth century. Why the association developed is also unclear. The connection of the feast with Mary's purification after childbirth and the belief that blessed candles, especially those blessed and used at Candlemas, had apotropaic powers may be a sufficient explanation. By the later Middle Ages, the custom was well established and the candle had come to stand as a symbol of the infant Jesus, carried by his mother at her Purification and, symbolically, by the faithful during the Candlemas procession.[71] In early-sixteenth-century Germany (1512), a woman whose child had died due to miscarriage or abortion came for her churching bearing an unlighted candle, suggesting that it might also have stood as a symbol of the newly born infant.[72]

The custom of a new mother carrying a candle at her purification is not consistently documented in French sources. The penitential of *Pseudo-Theodore* prescribed that women bring a candle with them when they come for purification. The association of candles, Candlemas, and churching, and the fact that candles became a routine element in late medieval French representations of the Purification, Mary's churching, suggests that they continued to be a part of the French rite, although specific references to them are rare. The clearest description of a French custom of women carrying candles for their churching appears in two twelfth-century charters from the diocese of Troyes. We turn now to that period to continue examining the development of churching in France.

A story from a twelfth-century chronicle reveals that the notions of impurity expressed in the penitentials were also played out in the lives of the French people. The story is contained in the chronicles of the Counts of Anjou and relates the storming of a castle by the followers of Hugh of Calvomonte. When Hugh's men had succeeded in establishing control over the castle's tower, they attached a banner from the tower's highest point proclaiming their victory. The chronicler continued:

> Many of Hugh's men, running quickly, taking their cue from this, entered the tower and carried the wife of Robert of Avessiaco, who had given birth

> within [the tower] but whose time of purification was not at hand, upon her bed all the way to the home of her husband which was not far from the gate of the castle.[73]

Robert's wife was still, apparently, lying-in after the birth of her child. It is possible that she was not yet physically able to get up; perhaps she was suffering from the effects of a difficult delivery. In the text, carrying the whole bed seems connected with the fact that the woman's time of purification had not yet arrived, although why this would be so is open to interpretation. The action of picking up the whole bed with her in it rather than just carrying the woman gives the impression that the men did not want to touch her, which implies a sense of pollution. Alternatively, she may not have been allowed out of bed before her time of purification. What is clear from this interesting story is that notions of purification played a role in the lives of people at the time. The exact date of the event recorded in the chronicle is uncertain but it was sometime after the late eleventh century and before 1155.

Documentation for the widespread use of a rite of purification after childbirth becomes consistent and relatively abundant beginning only in the second half of the twelfth century. Anecdotal evidence suggests that by this time the practice was well established and that women like Robert's wife had already been receiving such blessings for a long time. In 1178, Matheus, bishop of Troyes, attempted to settle a dispute between the monks of Saint-Pierre de la Celle and the priests of his diocese over parochial incomes. In the charter he issued, Matheus described the custom of women coming for churching, carrying candles and gifts, and accompanied by other women also bearing gifts.[74] Seven years later Matheus's successor, Manasses, was addressing the same problem. He issued a lengthy charter, describing the incomes of each parish involved in the dispute and dividing their incomes between the monks and the priests. The offerings of women being churched and the women who accompanied them for the service, along with the income from marriages and baptisms, figured into a number of parish incomes.[75] These descriptions and their context, a long-standing argument over income, suggest a well-established practice of churching in the diocese of Troyes by the second half of the twelfth century.

The most consistent information about this practice comes, however, from synodal statutes, which are particularly valuable sources for the problems and practices of local churches. Although the Fourth Lateran council (1215) required bishops to hold regular synods and to ensure the dissemination of synodal statutes, the statutes remained malleable and adaptable to local circumstances and needs as they had always been, with the local

bishop being the final authority.[76] Because of this local specificity, synodal statutes are a key source of information about when, where, and how churching was practiced in northern France. They also have their limitations. They were clearly prescriptive literature: collections of rules and regulations for the lives of the clergy and the laity. As such, they reveal what the bishops wanted rather than providing a description of what the clergy or the laity actually did. However, a repeated call to correct a certain abuse is also revealing. It is often precisely this sort of situation, with bishops railing against the abuses of churching, that brings evidence of purification rituals into synodal statutes.[77] These statutes, together with records from episcopal courts, reveal churching to have been a vibrant and valued practice in many regions of northern France during the central and later Middle Ages.

In 1179, Bishop Henry of Senlis demanded that the duties of parochial care not fall on the shoulders of the canons in his diocese, the community of men living at the cathedral who followed a rule of religious life and recited the canonical hours. Bishop Henry considered it unsuitable for the canons to perform marriages, purify new mothers, and intervene in the brawls and squabbles of the laity.[78] His inclusion of churching in this list of the commonplace activities of parish clergy suggests that he considered the rite to be as common as marriage, as everyday as disagreements between parishioners. The bishop's statement also indicates that some sort of clerical action was being taken for women in order to ensure their purification after childbirth although what this consisted of is not specified in the statute. However, it seems plausible to assume that Henry was referring to a rite of purification similar to those that appear in liturgical books in the late Middle Ages.[79]

Evidence of churching in France is much stronger from the thirteenth century on. By then synodal statutes from Rouen, Paris, Soissons, Cambrai, Angers, Liège, Noyon, and Arras all contained regulations concerning the churching of women.[80] Statutes from Bayeux, Troyes, Chartres, Sées, and Meaux confirm that churching was a custom in these places by at least the fourteenth century,[81] and fifteenth-century statutes concerning the custom are found in the dioceses of Reims, Coutances, Lisieux, Amiens, and Tournai.[82] In all but five of these, or in seventy-four percent of the dioceses, the first statute on churching occurs in one of the earliest surviving collections of statutes for that diocese, most within fifty years.[83] In Coutances, Lisieux, Reims, Tournai, and Troyes, or in twenty-six percent of the dioceses, the first statute on churching was issued at least 130 years after the earliest surviving collections of synodal statutes for the diocese.[84] In every case the regulations regarding churching concerned an established practice and were not written to implement something new. Evidence from statutes suggests, then, that women were being churched in most of

these places before the surviving statutes mentioned it. Thus Bishop Henry's statute suggests that by 1179, churching was a commonplace in the parishes of Senlis.

The absence of statutes concerning churching, especially prior to 1215, cannot be taken as evidence that churching was not being done in a region or diocese. The statutes do reveal, however, that churching was not a practice everywhere and even if it was established in a region, it did not necessarily persist. In an early-thirteenth-century statute for the diocese of Cambrai, for example, priests were prohibited from demanding money before performing a purification after childbirth.[85] Presumably, then, churching was fairly common in Cambrai at the time. Two hundred years later, however, a liturgical manual for use in Cambrai stated that purification for women after childbirth was not the practice in Cambrai, although it was done in neighboring places following diverse customs.[86] Following this disclaimer, the manual provides a ritual for the purification of women after childbirth apparently for use in those places where churching was a custom. Since the thirteenth-century statute was for the entire diocese of Cambrai and the later disclaimer, perhaps, only for the city of Cambrai itself, it may be that churching was never customary in the city. On the other hand, it might mean that the custom had changed and that churching was, for some reason, no longer practiced in the city. However one explains the situation at Cambrai, it seems clear that the practice of churching existed not universally but in many parts of northern France from at least the late twelfth century until after the close of the fifteenth. During that period, churching was considered a part of normal parish responsibilities.

We have already seen that Matheu and Manasses, bishops of Troyes in the late twelfth century, considered churching a part of parish income in their diocese. By the thirteenth century, bishops had reserved churching as a right of the parish. In 1224, Robert and his wife Aenor, count and countess of Dreux and Brienne-le-Château, had drawn up a charter for a private chapel in their manor. The charter was approved by Theobald, the archbishop of Rouen. It spelled out clearly the responsibilities and obligations of the chaplain who would serve Robert and Aenor and ensured that their chapel would not infringe on the privileges of the local parish. After promising to give the appropriate amount in offerings to the parish on the principle feast days of the year, Robert went on to say,

> our chaplain should receive nothing from the parishioners of the same parish as offerings, not for penance or purification or other things which the parishioners ought, by parochial rights, to receive from their own priest. In fact, if it should happen that our wife or another woman in our manor of St. Albinus gives birth, the purification of our wife or the woman and the

> baptism of the child shall belong to the parish priest. We also concede as belonging to the same priest confessions and sentences of penance, marriage, the final anointing of the sick, and burial of the dead.[87]

The charter makes it clear that the right to perform a churching, as well as other important rituals, was the exclusive preserve of the parish priest and not of simple chaplains. Episcopal legislation followed a similar pattern. In 1370, for example, the bishop of Bayeux prohibited all chaplains in his diocese from performing marriages and purifications after childbirth unless they had received a special license to do so.[88]

Synodal statutes intended to regulate and control parish administration also suggest the popularity of churching and the tendency of the bishops to think of it as a sacrament similar to marriage or rites for the dead. A thirteenth-century bishop of Noyon, for example, declared that no priest should receive for purification any woman from another parish.[89] A statute issued from Soissons in 1334 threatened to excommunicate any man or woman who attempted to procure the blessing of marriage, purification after childbirth, or any other church sacrament from anyone other than their parish priest, especially from members of religious orders.[90]A record from an ecclesiastical court in Normandy suggests that a similar statute had been issued earlier in that region.[91] The regulations protecting the rights of parish priests to administer purification after childbirth suggest competition between parishes or secular and regular clergy. The rites mentioned specifically in these statutes—marriage, burial, and sometimes baptism—marked key ritual moments that the clergy expected Christians to celebrate with appropriate ecclesiastical liturgies. The inclusion of churching in these lists indicates that it was seen in a similar light as a commonly performed and important ritual. Many of these disputes were, no doubt, territorial squabbles over the authority to control these key rites. In other cases, however, the argument was over money.

Sometime between 1280 and 1285 the bishop of Noyon was faced with the problem of priests demanding inflated fees for the performance of their parish duties. He attempted to solve the problem by establishing a set fee for certain rites, including churching.

> It has come to our attention that certain priests of our diocese. . .are turning to wicked demands in order to feed themselves; they are extorting [from their parishioners] more than should be due because it is permitted for them to receive as much from the reconciliation of women as from marriage. Therefore, wishing to prevent their greediness and avarice, we order that priests should be satisfied with three sous for celebrating blessings of marriage, and twelve deniers for celebrating reconciliations of women [and] the rest [of the church sacraments].[92]

Similar statutes were issued in Cambrai in the early thirteenth century, at Angers in 1269, and at Liège around 1290.[93] Priests in poor parishes and those without a sufficient benefice relied on the income from marriages, funerals, and other sacraments.[94] Again, including churching in these statutes indicates the regular performance of the rite and the expectation that it would, like marriage and Christian burial, provide steady income for the parish.

The bishops also referred to churching as a sacrament like marriage and burial. In general, this reflects the broader medieval understanding of a sacrament as any ritual or blessing that conferred grace. More specifically, however, it reflects the clergy's tendency to think of it as a rite of purification capable of removing the taint of lust. We will see this sense of the term in sermons comparing churching to Mary's purification after the birth of Jesus. The ability of churching to remove the stain of sin may also have been the reason for a unique fourteenth-century statute issued in Cambrai requiring that a woman not be churched earlier than one month after the birth unless she was in danger of death.[95] Here, the bishop allowed churching to be administered to a woman in danger of dying in childbed, that is, when the church's primary concern was to help her prepare for death. Though churching was never used as a substitute for the sacrament of penance, clerical references such as this indicate the value and importance attached to the rite.

By the late Middle Ages, then, churching became an important part of parish life in many regions of northern France but this had developed gradually over a long period. As we have seen, the earliest suggestions of any practice in the Latin Church dealing with women's purification after childbirth come from the penitentials and Gregory's response to Augustine of Canterbury. These indicate that, between the seventh and ninth centuries, notions of impurity connected to childbirth were well known. The Christian response to these ideas sometimes referred to a purification but more often spoke only of a period of separation. This included a separation from the worshipping community as well as a sexual separation from a woman's husband. The records do not reveal how strictly this was adhered to by women in the Frankish realm. A woman's ability or willingness to follow these restrictions would have been influenced by a variety of factors including her social status, her religious beliefs, her relationship with her husband or sexual partners, and community pressure. Still, some women, perhaps most, complied and the custom continued.

In the ninth century we have the first description of a rite of purification used to resolve a woman's impurity after childbirth. At the end of her period of separation, whether her baby had survived or not, a woman went to the church. She carried a candle and an offering. Thus the completion

of her separation and period of impurity was marked publicly and ritually. What transpired at the church, the record does not say. Presumably, the offering was given in return for some clerical action, which could have been a simple prayer or a more complex rite. Of course, it is also possible that the ritual entailed only the woman's actions, that her arrival at the church bearing a candle and a gift was recognized as the symbolic end of her impurity. In either case, we see a ritualization of purification by the ninth century. By the twelfth century there are clear indications that parish priests in many places were performing a ritual of purification for new mothers, some of whom came to church carrying candles and a gift. At this point we can finally speak of churching, a liturgical event that marked a woman's return to church and the end of her period of impurity after childbirth.

No single source or influence could account for a custom that developed in such complex ways over such a long period, even in the earlier period for which we have so little solid information. The idea that childbirth was dirty and a source of pollution was, as we have seen, current in the West by the fourth century. This belief was nurtured by larger arguments about the impurity of sexual activity, in general, and of sexually active women, in particular, that had already been circulating in both the East and the West. I think it is likely that both ideas about women's impurity and the purity codes of Leviticus contributed to the development of ideas and customs surrounding women's impurity after childbirth. The material we have seen in the penitentials, however, which provides the first real evidence for the existence of these customs in France, cannot be fully explained by these things alone.

The authors of the penitentials were no doubt familiar with the passages from Hebrew Scriptures containing purity codes for women experiencing a flow of blood, Leviticus 15:19–30 and Leviticus 12:1–8. However, there are important differences between Leviticus and the penitentials. The penitential texts follow the Mosaic code of forty days of separation for having a boy: seven days before circumcision plus thirty-three after. They differ from Leviticus, however, in not requiring a woman to remain separated for eighty days, even if she had borne a daughter. In addition, Leviticus makes no distinctions between married and unmarried mothers, while the penitentials suggest that sexual abstinence was imposed only on married mothers and separation from sacred space on all.

The penitentials also differ from Leviticus in the words they use to describe the blood purification connected with this period of separation. Leviticus refers to "the blood of her purification" (*sanguine purificationis suae*), whereas the early medieval texts use a variety of phrases all somewhat different from the biblical wording. Some do not even use the word

purification but speak instead of a cleansing, a more mundane term that connotes something less formal than the rite described in Leviticus. Even when the same words are used, it is not clear that the authors of the penitentials had in mind the same notions of blood pollution described in Mosaic law.

Finally, unlike the Mosaic law, the penitentials do not specify what sort of purification was required or, indeed, if time alone sufficed to cleanse a woman of the impurity she suffered as a result of giving birth. It is entirely possible that in the seventh and eighth centuries a period of separation was all that was required for purification. When a ritual is described, it follows Leviticus in having the woman bring an offering to church, but differs by including a candle. This might be connected with the Christian feast of Candlemas, though this is by no means a certain explanation for the ninth-century practice. The authors of the penitentials, then, were not simply following the purity codes set down in the Hebrew Scriptures but were responding to other influences as well.

The possibility that churching may have had connections to folk beliefs or served as a rite of passage has been mentioned by other scholars.[96] In his classic *Rites of Passage*, Arnold van Gennep considered churching in anthropological terms, describing it as a rite of transition that marked a woman's passage from one condition, the enclosure of childbirth, to another, full participation in the life of the community.[97] Anthropological observations of separation and purification practices in other societies are not difficult to find and suggest that many cultures have beliefs and customs regarding childbirth that seem quite similar to those found in Leviticus.

Margaret Mead, for example, found that natives of New Guinea required a woman to remain separate from the rest of the villagers for thirty days after the birth of a child. The end of this period of separation was marked with ritual and festivity.[98] Similar findings that, on the surface, bear a striking resemblance to the codes found in Leviticus have been reported by other anthropologists.[99] However, the observation of similar practices does not necessarily confirm the presence of similar beliefs regarding purity or impurity. The ban on intercourse after childbirth observed by Mead among the Arapesh of New Guinea was not based on any notion of impurity in the new mother but rather on a belief that the father's intercourse with any woman at this time, even one of his other wives, would bring harm to the new child by sapping away needed energy.[100]

Any argument that churching has its roots in folk practices must, therefore, be made carefully but this possibility need not be dismissed completely as David Cressy seems to have done when he reduced anthropological argument and theory to a discussion of pollution and taboo.[101] It is certainly possible that the Germanic peoples living in the Frankish realm had

practices of separation and reintegration for women after childbirth, though we cannot know and should not presume that such practices expressed notions of women's impurity. If such practices existed, the Church would have been likely to absorb and convert them to Christian usage, giving them whatever meaning and value the Christian missionaries brought with them. The result would be a practice with a diversity of meanings that conformed, on the surface, to the beliefs and concerns of the missionaries. It is quite possible that this is what we see in the penitentials. Indeed, the understanding of churching as a ritual with multiple meanings, which Cressy argues for quite convincingly, is enhanced by such a possibility.

A final though by no means unimportant consideration in the development of churching is the impact of women on the rite.[102] Women were a part of this process from its beginning. Even though they did not compose penitentials or draw up synodal statutes, we should not forget their presence and potential influence. How women contributed to the shaping of the various practices surrounding childbirth in the early history of churching is impossible to say but surely they had something to say about matters with which they were so intimately connected. Whereas the penitentials associated customs of separation and purification with pollution, anthropological literature and the attitudes of modern Jewish women remind us that Germanic women may have approached these things with quite different attitudes than those expressed by the clergy. Women may have influenced the development of customs surrounding churching or the practices of separation to satisfy their own interests. Certainly, after the twelfth century, the efforts of Frenchwomen to shape churching to meet their own needs becomes visible. It is important to remember that churching was always, to some extent, a women's rite.

The origins of churching in medieval France were, then, the result of many factors: ideas and attitudes about sexuality developed in the first five centuries of Christianity, perhaps indigenous Germanic customs married to the beliefs of Christian missionaries, adaptations of the Mosaic purity codes, and the invisible efforts of women. The ritual of churching that had developed by the twelfth century is not, however, the end of the story. We turn next to the actions of French bishops whose legislation between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries shaped the meaning and enhanced the importance of churching for women and men of the later Middle Ages.

CHAPTER 2

OB HONOREM SACRAMENTI MATRIMONII: THE REDEFINITION OF CHURCHING

A statute issued by the bishop of Meaux in 1493 included a clear statement of the meaning churching had acquired by the end of the Middle Ages. The statute began with the passage from Pope Gregory, perhaps drawn from Gratian or a collection of canon law, in which Gregory stated that women ought not be kept away from church after giving birth to a child unless they chose to do this out of devotion. The bishop then turned to the customs of Meaux.

> Therefore, being led to some extent for a long time by [Gregory's words], for the honor of the sacrament of marriage and in order to clearly demonstrate that a child is legitimate, we have in our diocese up to now observed the custom that women who gave birth to their children in legitimate marriage stayed away [from church, and] in order that this be brought to light, a certain number of days having passed, they process to the church, are brought inside by the parish priest with an aspersion of exorcised water, and there blessed bread is offered to them. Other women, however, who have conceived and given birth, not in legitimate marriage but from incestuous or other adulterous or fornicating intercourse, whether they have stayed away [from church] or not, are denied this sort of solemnity in condemnation of these crimes. Considering it not to be out of harmony with the law and approving this custom as far as there is need, we strictly order each and every parish priests under our authority to deny entrance into church to no woman after and on account of childbirth unless another canonical impediment should stand in the way; but following the aforesaid custom, only those women who have conceived and given birth in legitimate marriage should be received for purification with the accompanying solemnity and admitted into his church, if [these rites] have been requested.[1]

The bishop's words emphasize two developments in the Church's understanding of the ritual. First, the bishop did not describe churching as a rite of purification but as a means of honoring marriage and recognizing a legitimate birth. This new understanding, though not conflicting with earlier definitions of the rite, shifted attention away from a woman's polluted condition and instead focused on her social status as a legitimate wife and mother. Following from this redefinition of churching, the bishop's statute also makes clear a second development. Churching was now a privilege for proper matrons; mothers who conceived and bore their children outside the bounds of proper marriage were to be refused a solemn celebration.

The earliest evidence for this redefinition of churching are statutes issued in the thirteenth century prohibiting certain kinds of mothers from the public ritual of purification. Gradually, the restrictions were extended to include any mother who gave birth outside of legitimate marriage. The appearance of this legislation was part of wider movements in the central and later Middle Ages: the persecution of minorities and heretics, ecclesiastical reform that focused on clerical authority and the enforcement of priestly celibacy, and changes in attitudes toward marriage. Through this process of regulation, medieval bishops in northern France made churching a tool of ecclesiastical discipline and a means of enhancing clerical power and authority.

During the twelfth century, as we have seen, synodal statutes regarding churching were largely concerned with protecting parish rights and incomes. The bishops described churching as a sacrament, a rite of purification for women, and a source of legitimate income for parish priests. The first statute explicitly prohibiting the churching of certain women appeared in 1238. It was issued by Peter Colmieu, archbishop of Rouen from 1238 to 1244. "We order to be punished priests who purify the serving girls/concubines (*focarias*) of their brother priests as well as other adulteresses or concubines (*focarias*) without license from us either through the local archdeacon or the current penitentiaries at Rouen."[2] The wording of this statute, specifically addressing the problem of clerical concubines being churched by other clerics, is unique to Rouen, probably reflecting the deeply entrenched custom of clerical concubinage in Normandy.[3] The use of the term *focarias* rather than *concubinas* is also interesting. *Focarias* can be translated as kitchen girls, servants, or concubines. Thus although the statute clearly prohibited the churching of clerical wives it also operated as a slur on these women and as a condemnation of clerical concubinage.[4]

The licenses Peter referred to were granted, in the name of the bishop, by his appointed official, usually an archdeacon or an archpriest.[5] They were required in any situation that deviated from established practice, such

as the burial of an excommunicate in consecrated ground or, as we have here, the purification of a woman who was not properly married.[6] Such licenses could only be legally acquired by going through the proper channels and paying a fee. Determined individuals, however, could find ways around such procedures, as we shall see.

After 1238, statutes barring the churching of improperly married women without special license from the bishop became common. By 1270, the ban included women who had given birth outside of marriage. In that year, Bishop Nicholas Gellent of Angers included in his diocesan statutes the following instructions to his parish clergy.

> We understand that not only the women demanding disobedience of their husbands who are under a ban of excommunication, but also others having given birth from fornication or adultery, or else from other illicit intercourse, and desiring purification after birth, secretly or clandestinely come into church after the priests have begun solemn mass, and by this improvisation have themselves purified by the priest. On account of this we order and forbid any woman to be admitted to her mass or purification after childbirth unless, through sure messenger, either in early morning at least before the bells are rung for mass or on the day before, it has been made known to the priest that she wants to come for purification, so that [the matter] having been carefully weighed by the priests, they may admit those who should be admitted and turn away those who should be turned away. And these [regulations], which are enjoined on them at the synod, the priests should announce to their parishioners in their churches on Sundays and holydays.[7]

Apparently, the bishop was having some trouble controlling who was being churched in his diocese. He clearly expected his clergy to know whom they were churching and insisted that they use this knowledge and their authority to ensure that only the proper women were being admitted for purification. In this case, "those who should be admitted" meant only wives who were under no ecclesiastical prohibition and had borne a legitimate child. Moreover, Nicholas wanted to ensure that the laity knew about these regulations and so ordered his priests to announce them from the pulpit on Sundays and holidays, when the greatest number of parishioners would be there to hear them.

A similar statute was published in Cambrai in 1311 under Bishop Peter of Mirepoix in which the bishop spelled out the punishment a priest could expect if he failed to follow the law.

> We prohibit priests, or chaplains, or even their vicars from receiving for purification women in childbed, condemned because of shameful intercourse or fornication which are made public, without having received a

> special license from us or our official at Cambrai or from the local deans of the city of Cambrai. Anyone who dares to act contrary to this should incur on himself a sentence of excommunication and, furthermore, should be punished as gravely as his guilt demands by our official or the local dean.[8]

A few years later, in 1320, this statute was repeated with a slight alteration. The punishment was omitted and the prohibition against churching without special license was stated to include all unmarried women (*mulieres non uxoratas*) who gave birth by illicit intercourse or fornication.[9] Similar prohibitions were issued at the end of the fourteenth and throughout the fifteenth century, including Sées in 1369 and 1444, Bayeux in 1370, Tournai in 1481, Rouen in 1484, and Meaux in 1493.[10]

A prohibition against the churching of women who had conceived within incestuous relationships appeared in 1370, in a statute from Bayeux. "Very frequently, it is painful to note, in this diocese incestuous intercourse is reported to have occurred: we order that, if the said incest is public or is divulged in any place, the woman in no way is to be admitted for purification before [she is] punished by suspension and excommunication."[11] The tone of this statute and its harsh treatment of the women in question suggests that the bishop was primarily concerned with eliminating incest and avoiding public scandal rather than with the regulation of churching per se.[12] In other places, women who gave birth from incestuous unions are simply included among the list of disreputable mothers who must obtain special licenses. They are not denied churching altogether nor threatened with excommunication. This less stringent approach is found in the statutes from Tournai in 1481 and Meaux in 1493.

It is interesting to note that the statute from Tournai specifically mentioned not only women guilty of incest but also "nuns, hospitalers, beguines, and other religious woman."[13] Like the Norman statute prohibiting the churching of clerical concubines by other priests, the reference to beguines in this statute reflected a local problem. The phenomenon of beguines, religious women who led lives of poverty and chastity but without a fixed rule, organization, or final vows, began in the Low Countries and northern France in the late twelfth century.[14] Throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the movement was especially strong in this region, including cities such as Tournai. These women posed a problem for churchmen, such as Guibert of Tournai who remarked in 1274, "there are among us women whom we have no idea what to call, ordinary women or nuns, for they live neither in the world nor out of it."[15] As women who failed to conform to societal norms by entering neither marriage nor the convent, beguines were easily suspected of inappropriate behavior; they were sometimes accused of heresy and of sexual transgressions,

although they were not necessarily guilty of these crimes. By refusing to church beguines, the bishop apparently sought to discourage what he perceived as wanton behavior among a problematic group of women in his diocese. Statutes such as this reveal the clergy's tendency to use churching as a tool for ecclesiastical discipline, an idea that we will see again in legislation concerning the involvement of midwives in churching.

Clerical concubines had been excluded from churching in the thirteenth century but the first statutes explicitly excluding laymen's concubines appeared only in the fifteenth century. A statute issued for the ecclesiastical province of Reims in 1408 directed that bishops or their delegates should inquire about the churching of concubines during their visitations to local parishes. They were to ask the local priests "if through his neglect. . .he admits for solemn purification women having children in concubinage."[16] Another statute, issued from Lisieux in 1452, stated that "all priests under our authority, if they have known any parishioner who keeps concubines openly, should denounce this to our promoter: neither should they in any way receive concubines for purification without a letter from us under pain of grave punishment."[17] Statutes that specifically prohibited the churching of concubines were also issued at Amiens in 1464, Coutances in 1481, and at Meaux in 1493.[18]

So, by the end of the Middle Ages, the bishops of northern France had issued a series of statutes explicitly excluding fornicators, adulteresses, lay and clerical concubines, and women guilty of incest from solemn churching unless they received a letter from the bishop. That is, all mothers not legally married to the father of the child could only be churched by special license. Free and open access to the ritual had become a privilege of the properly married mother.

Whereas the legislation of churching as a privilege of legitimately married mothers appeared only in the thirteenth century, the connection between churching and married mothers that allowed for and encouraged this sort of legislation had begun much earlier. As we saw in chapter 1, penitentials produced in the seventh and eighth centuries made a distinction between married and unmarried women when discussing purification after childbirth. The compilers of these texts applied the ideal of staying away from church for a period after birth and before purification to all mothers. The idea that mothers should observe a period of abstinence before purification, however, applied more exclusively to married women.

In the twelfth century, this distinction was repeated in two influential works by Ivo of Chartres, an important French bishop and scholar, and Gratian, a teacher of canon law and probably a monk from Bologna.[19] Ivo's work was not a penitential but he included a section on penance and used material from the penitentials. Gratian's work too was not a penitential in

any sense of the term nor did he borrow from the penitentials. But Gratian's *Decretum* was, as we shall see, extremely influential on penitential literature written in the later Middle Ages.

Ivo of Chartres, working at the turn of the twelfth century, referred to the purification of women after childbirth in his *Decretum*, an important collection of canon law that he undertook in an effort to consolidate and organize all the various legal texts and authorities. In part eight, *De Conjugiis*, Ivo included the part of the letter of Pope Gregory I to Augustine of Canterbury that discussed the practice of using wet nurses.[20] He thus included in his legal collection the association of abstinence after childbirth with married mothers. He also stated in chapter 151 of his *De Poenitentia* that women who entered a church before blood purification (*ante mundum sanguinem*) after childbirth should do penance on bread and water for as long as they should have stayed away from church. Anyone who had intercourse (*concuberit*) during this time should do penance for ten days.[21] Thus Ivo's *Decretum*, completed near the beginning of the twelfth century, included the language of the earlier penitentials that made abstinence before purification a matter for married women. At the same time, he certainly did not suggest that purification after childbirth was exclusively concerned with married mothers.

Forty years later, Gratian wrote his *Decretum* or the *Concordia discordantium canonum*. Gratian's work was an effort to resolve differences between canonical authorities and went far beyond collecting and organizing texts, as Ivo had done. His only references to purification after childbirth are taken from the letter of Pope Gregory to Augustine of Canterbury.[22] He included Gregory's arguments concerning women after childbirth in Distinction 5 in which he considered the immutability of natural law, which he equated with divine law. He used Gregory's words to raise the question of how certain commandments, such as the purity code in Leviticus that prohibited women from entering sacred space before purification, could change. He went on to answer this question in Distinction 6 by arguing that natural law does not change, but commands regarding symbolic acts (such as the purity codes in Leviticus) could change without altering the underlying meaning of the law.[23] It was precisely this sort of argument and analysis that made Gratian's *Decretum* such an important contribution to canon law.

In Distinction 5, Gratian included Gregory's discussion concerning the custom of employing wet nurses, and thus incorporated into his *Decretum* the association between abstinence after childbirth and married mothers. But he also included Pope Gregory's opinion that a woman could come into church in the very hour of giving birth if she wished to give thanks for her delivery.[24] Here Gratian, following Gregory, left the marital status of

the new mother uncertain. He described her as a woman (*mulier*) rather than as a wife (*uxor*) and nowhere in the discussion did he suggest that he was thinking only of married mothers. Both Gratian and Ivo, then, limited their discussion of sexual abstinence to married mothers but applied the ideal of staying away from church to women in general.

Beginning in the thirteenth century, a new kind of penitential literature began to appear in the form of confessors' manuals. These were more sophisticated than the penitentials and were designed to be both practical and theologically current. Although not all confessors' manuals mentioned the issue of purification after childbirth, those that did usually made it clear that they connected this with marriage and marital sexuality. Many of these manuals relied on Gratian's *Decretum* and referred to Distinction 5 in which he discussed marital intercourse before purification and the freedom of women to enter a church before being purified after childbirth.[25] In confessors' manuals, however, these references appeared in chapters concerned with marriage and used language that referred explicitly to wives (*uxores*) or to the conjugal debt (*debitum*).

Thomas of Chobham wrote one of the first manuals of confession, his *Summa Confessorum*, which he completed around 1216.[26] Thomas's *Summa* is a good example of the language and approach used by the authors of confessors' manuals when referring to purification after childbirth. The second part of Thomas's book, *De luxuria*, was concerned with riotous living and vices such as gluttony and drunkenness and also included the section *De coitu conjugali*, "On Marital Intercourse." Here he considered the question of what would constitute *coitus impetuosus*, that is, intercourse driven by ungoverned passion, and divided his answer into four categories. The first three were intercourse with a prostitute, intercourse against the woman's will, and intercourse at prohibited times. The fourth was intercourse with a woman who was either in the last stages of pregnancy, in her menstrual period, or had recently delivered a child. He considered sexual relations at these times to be dangerous and inappropriate; however, in the case of a newly delivered mother, he also included a caveat that could apply in situations of dire necessity. He wrote:

> In truth however, it is known that if a man demands the debt from his recently delivered wife (*uxore sua puerpera*) and she should fear that, through her, her husband will fall [into sin] it is advised that she immediately come for purification and immediately render the debt, since the canon says: if a woman enters the church even at the very hour of her delivery, for the purpose of giving thanks, she is not guilty of any sin.[27]

He repeated this caveat in a later section of the *Summa* in which he addressed the question of sexual abstinence.[28] In both of these cases,

Thomas relied on the opinion of Gregory to support his position that a woman could be purified any time after the birth of her child, but, also, made clear his understanding that this applied to married women.

Later manuals for confessors follow a similar pattern. Many of these manuals, like that of Thomas, originated outside of France but were frequently copied and apparently enjoyed a wide circulation in the French Church during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Like Thomas, they included purification after childbirth in their discussion of marriage. The work of John of Fribourg (ca. 1298), John of Erfurt (ca. 1295/1302), Astesanus of Asti (1317), William of Auvergne (thirteenth century), and Anthony of Florence (d. 1459) all included purification in the section concerning marriage, *De matrimonio* or *De actu matrimonii*.[29] There was no mention of purification in Raymond of Peñafort's original edition of his *Summa de Poenitentia et Matrimonio*, but a discussion of the subject was added as a gloss by William of Rennes, a Dominican priest well acquainted with Paris and its academic circles.[30] In each of these, the issue of purification came up when considering questions on the marriage debt or periods of sexual abstinence between married couples.

If the authors of confessors' manuals discussed a woman entering church before being purified, they quoted Gregory's opinion that it was not a sin but a custom open to local interpretation. Like Thomas, their interest in this custom came from the desire to clarify questions concerning intercourse between married couples. John of Fribourg, for example, mentioned the practice of women staying away from church when he answered the question: Is it a mortal sin for a man to have intercourse with his wife after childbirth and before her purification? John followed Gratian and reasoned that it could not be a mortal sin, and indeed that one who rendered the debt at this time did not sin at all. He continued:

> Note also what more is said concerning purification after childbirth. If women want to enter a church after giving birth in order to give thanks they do not sin nor are they being prohibited. If however, out of respect, they wanted to stay away for some time, their devotion is not disapproved. But it also says in the gloss above [on Gratian's distinction] that if a woman asks for the debt from her husband during the time of purgation he should not give it to her unless there is fear of her fornicating.[31]

For John, the question of women staying away from church mattered only in the context of rendering the conjugal debt. Like Thomas of Chobham, he used the custom to point out that a woman could seek purification at any time if this would keep her from sinning. However, it is interesting to note that Thomas, concerned about the husband's possible sin, urged the

woman to "come immediately for purification and immediately render the debt" whereas John, who framed the issue in terms of the woman's potential to sin, urged the husband to refuse his wife unless he thought she would sin. Although this difference might reflect the difference between Thomas and John as individuals, it also indicates a more general tendency to approach the sexual needs of men and women differently and with a greater sympathy toward male interests. Thomas even stressed the idea that the woman was somehow responsible for her husband's moral lapse (*timeat se lapsu viri*).

Further, as historian Dyan Elliott has pointed out, it underlines the fact that clerical insistence on the mutuality of the conjugal debt actually placed a heavier burden on women than men to respond to the sexual demands of their partner.[32] Today's new mothers are advised to postpone engaging in intercourse for two weeks after a normal delivery and six weeks if there are complications. Even a normal, uncomplicated delivery for a medieval woman would have been painful and exhausting and may easily have required more than two weeks for recovery. Thomas's advise that a new mother leap up from childbed and immediately go for purification so that she could quickly return to her husband's bed is an excellent example of the real impact such ideas could have on women's lives. For clerics such as Thomas, the conjugal debt was a more pressing issue than the new mother's health or recuperation.

Beginning in the thirteenth century, then, authors of confessors' manuals articulated questions about purification after childbirth in a distinctly different manner than we have seen in earlier authors. The compilers of the penitentials were concerned with cultic purity. They questioned how soon a woman could enter church after giving birth because of their desire to protect sacred space from defilement by the bleeding body of a new mother. For Thomas and other authors of confessors' manuals, however, the issue was not cultic purity but the conjugal debt, an idea familiar to the Church Fathers but never used in the early medieval penitentials. Clerics in the later Middle Ages did not see a woman's freedom to enter church immediately after childbirth as a question of Christian devotion versus the Mosaic purity code, but rather as a conflict between the demands of the conjugal debt and a new mother's desire to observe what was, by that time, a customary period of separation before returning to church for her purification. This shift in the argument makes the earlier distinction between married and unmarried mothers a moot point. If purification after childbirth is a question of when a couple can resume sexual relations, then it is always and only a question for married mothers. The authors of the confessors' manuals may well have known that improperly married women and unwed mothers also sought, and sometimes received, churching.

Nevertheless, these men clearly understood purification as a rite intended for married women to ensure and enable proper sexual relations within marriage.

Tracing references to purification in the penitentials and confessors' manuals reveals the way ideas about purification and the definition of churching evolved. By the central Middle Ages, the early medieval fear of pollution and desire for cultic purity had receded. Sexual abstinence within marriage remained a concern but was modified by a renewed interest in the conjugal debt. The ambiguous connection between postpartal purification and marriage expressed in the penitential literature disappeared. After the thirteenth century, references to purification were consistently connected to the sexual lives of married couples. It is also in the thirteenth century that we find statutes explicitly restricting the churching of women who gave birth outside of legitimate marriage.

Prior to the thirteenth century, there is little evidence that improperly married or unwed mothers were denied churching or were churched any differently than other women. The only reference that I have found of the churching of an illegitimate mother prior to the thirteenth century comes from the old French poem *Richeut*, written in the first half of the twelfth century. The poem describes the churching of Richeut following the birth of her illegitimate son. When the time came for Richeut to go to mass, the poem tells us, she dressed in a fine linen tunic over which she wore a beautiful green mantel with a long train. Though her neighbors commented to one another on her elegant attire, Richeut nonchalantly allowed the train of her gown to drag in the dirt.[33] Richeut's careless behavior, like her promiscuous sexuality, is a characteristic ploy of the fabliaux designed to satirize social customs. Yet, it is difficult to know if the humor rested on the fact that, against common practice, an unmarried mother was being churched or, as her neighbors' comments suggest, that she dressed so elegantly for the affair. Based on such evidence, it is impossible to determine with certainty whether the clergy understood the statutes prohibiting the churching of certain groups of women as expressing a new attitude or only the logical extension of long tradition. It is certain, however, that the focus on marriage in thirteenth-century legislation of churching was not an isolated concern. Locating the appearance of this legislation within its social and cultural contexts situates the redefinition of churching within larger and extremely important developments in later medieval church and society.

Beginning in the eleventh century and continuing into the thirteenth, European scholarship and intellectual life flourished and developed as it had not since before the collapse of Rome. New Latin translations of classical authors, notably the works of Aristotle, reinvigorated the intellectual atmosphere. Scholars applied the ideas they found in these "new" classics

to virtually every field of intellectual and cultural life: philosophy, natural science, and medicine; mathematics and music; theology and canon law. The results changed European culture profoundly as universities, Gothic cathedrals, and polyphonic music became part of medieval life in cities such as Paris and Oxford.

At the same time, Western Europeans were experiencing enormous social upheaval. The period was marked by struggles for powers on the highest levels of society, religious enthusiasm, both orthodox and heretical, ecclesiastical reform followed by intellectual revolution, and the rise of urban centers populated by a new and aspiring social class, the bourgeoisie. The consequences of these developments left their marks on many institutions, including the celebration of churching. For the history of that ritual, however, the most important social movements to consider are the eleventh- and twelfth-century ecclesiastical reforms, the heresies about marriage that circulated at the time, and developments in the theology and canon law of marriage in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The reforms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries revolved around issues of power based on the control of church property and moral authority.[34] A key issue for the reformers was the question of clerical celibacy, which had both practical and ideological implications.[35] Married clergy often passed on their positions and properties to their sons, thus limiting the ability of bishops or higher authorities to distribute church wealth and ecclesiastical offices. Besides, some reformers argued, children and wives consumed too much time and money. Beyond these practical concerns, the reformers also argued that marriage prohibited a priest from performing his duties properly. It was intolerable to some reformers that a man engage in marital relations with his wife and then proceed to the altar to perform his sacred duties as a priest. The cultic purity of the church could only be assured by enforcing the sexual purity of the clergy. Since even sex within marriage was a form of pollution, the reformers argued, the only solution was clerical celibacy. Articulate and vocal preachers, whose attacks on clerical marriage sometimes seemed to condemn marriage itself, gave this message widespread publicity.[36] In spite of adamant resistance from some members of the clergy, which became especially strong during the reign of Pope Gregory VII (1073–85), clerical celibacy and the moral superiority that it implied were increasingly seen as key marks of distinction between clergy and laity by the early twelfth century.[37] Rural parish priests continued to openly have wives, but now these women were identified as concubines. By the end of the century, clerical celibacy was assumed to be the rule, albeit one that was often broken.

The idea that celibacy brought moral superiority and, therefore, a right to leadership had already been expressed by French bishops in the early

eleventh century. As Georges Duby put it, the bishops imagined a "procession towards salvation, under the guidance of the best, the purest, the most angel-like of men, who naturally marched at the head of the line."[38] The hallmark of these leaders was their virginity. Gregory VII took this image to its logical conclusion when he claimed papal authority over kings and emperors.[39] On a more humble level, it was the superiority of the clergy grounded in their celibate dedication to God's service that gave both bishops and parish priests the right to govern the moral lives of the laity under their jurisdiction.

Perhaps inspired by the enthusiasm of the reformers who attacked clerical marriage and trumpeted the superiority of virginity, various unorthodox ideas about marriage began surfacing during the eleventh century.[40] To the dismay of the clergy, members of the laity who aspired to spiritual purity began to reject marriage in their pursuit of holiness.[41] The most prominent group espousing this idea was the Cathars, whose heretical views began circulating in France around the mid-twelfth century.[42] The Cathars preached a dualistic view of creation and, according to their teaching, all procreation was abhorrent because it entrapped a pure spirit within a corrupt body. Thus marriage was an evil institution to be avoided and disdained. In fact, all intercourse was evil and the orthodox distinction between marriage and fornication was meaningless. The Cathars taught that celibacy was the only choice that could lead to salvation, and their elite spiritual leaders, "the perfect," renounced all sexual activity. Celibacy was not demanded from the ordinary adherents to Catharism, though it was preached to them as the way to spiritual perfection.

The clergy were acutely aware of the danger this heresy posed, for it challenged the important distinction between a celibate clergy and the copulating laity. Having struggled to make celibacy the hallmark of a reformed and authoritative clergy, it was necessary to defend marriage as the honorable calling of the laity. The spread of ideas denigrating marriage was, therefore, a threat the clergy could ill afford. In addition, the church wanted to emphasize the value of marriage, which orthodox teaching had always upheld as good, and encourage among the laity a sense that their unions were sacred. It was, therefore, essential for the church to make clear its own position on marriage and marital sex. But in the aftermath of the reforms and under the influence of the intellectual renaissance of the twelfth century, this position was changing.

Prior to the eleventh century, the practice of marriage was determined more by lay views than by the theological arguments and moral opinions of the church.[43] Marriages were made by contracts between families as well as by abduction; concubinage was openly practiced and accepted as a kind of informal marriage, and men were free to repudiate their wives with little or

no cause. Incest, defined as a union between individuals related within the many prohibited degrees of kinship, was not uncommon.[44] The lay aristocracy approached marriage as a valuable political tool for the protection of the family lineage and inheritance. The freedom to arrange the most advantageous marriage, regardless of kinship and subject to change if the political winds shifted, as well as the freedom to dispose of a barren wife, were essential elements of marriage for the nobility. The clerical reformers of the central Middle Ages agreed that marriage was a family affair whose primary purpose was the production of children, but beyond that there were important differences of opinion.[45] The church viewed marriage from a moral perspective centered on monogamy, indissolubility, and the eternal salvation of the couple. For the clergy, political issues and matters of inheritance were secondary to the principle of indissolubility and the spiritual threat posed by adultery, bigamy, and incest.

By the late twelfth century, with the foundation provided by developments in theology and canon law made during the previous century, a new definition of marriage was being articulated that included elements of both the earlier lay and ecclesiastical models. Marriage was understood as a lifelong commitment, dissolvable only under very specific circumstances and then only through the power of the church.[46] It was still considered a family affair that ought not be entered into without proper parental approval; however, for a marriage to be valid, the church required only the free consent of the couple.[47] To ensure this freedom, the church encouraged the celebration of marriage *in facie ecclesia*, that is, in the presence of the church community, and with the blessing of a priest.[48] Marriage was also understood to be the only acceptable outlet for sexual activity; thus fornication, adultery, and concubinage were not only forbidden (as they had been in earlier centuries), but brought under ecclesiastical jurisdiction.[49]

In order to refute heretical ideas about sex and to promote the ideal of monogamy, the clergy paid particular attention to the place of sex within a proper marriage. The conjugal debt was a key issue in this discussion, though the idea of a marital debt was not new. Augustine had already written about this issue in the fifth century. But in their discussions and arguments about sex within marriage, canon lawyers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries gave the debt a new prominence. In his influential work on canon law, Gratian placed a great deal of emphasis on the conjugal debt. Though, as we have seen, he included earlier prohibitions on sexual activity, such as periods of abstinence during pregnancy or lactation, he subordinated them to the requirements of the conjugal debt, which he understood as both a right and a duty of marriage.[50] We have already seen Gratian's opinion clearly reflected in confessors' manuals. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century questions about when and where the conjugal debt could be paid

and if or how greatly such actions were sinful generated considerable debate and anxiety among the clergy.[51] Gradually, in response to the need to defend marriage and through such arguments, marital sex came to hold a more positive place within marriage than in earlier opinion. Some theologians even argued that if a spouse engaged in intercourse because it had been requested by his or her partner it was a meritorious act.[52]

Many of the most important theologians of the central Middle Ages wrote about marriage in this positive light, defending it as a sacred institution. Hugh of Saint-Victor, writing in the twelfth century, even described married love as holy:

> Can you find anything else in marriage except conjugal society which makes it sacred and by which you can assert that it is holy? And if this is true when the two become one flesh, is it not even more so when they become one mind? If they make each other partner of their flesh and are holy, is it possible for them to be partners in the soul and not be holy?[53]

Although he was writing to extol the goodness of mutual love in an unconsummated marriage, Hugh's language in this passage granted marital sex a place of honor and respect.[54] Some clerical authors were even open to the possibility that marriage need not be an obstacle to real sanctity.[55] Peter Lombard, in his influential *Sententiae*, numbered marriage among the seven sacraments, and his writings on marriage contributed to a greatly increased interest in the conjugal debt as an essential and honorable element of marital affection.[56] In the thirteenth century, Albert the Great and his pupil, Thomas Aquinas, argued that marriage was both good and natural and that the sexual act itself, when done within the sacred institution of marriage, was honorable, even sinless in certain cases.[57]

In order to translate this new definition of marriage into reality, the Church needed to educate the parish clergy as well as the laity and put into place an effective disciplinary system capable of enforcing legal sanctions. Confessors' manuals reflected the new definition of marriage and, insofar as they were read by parish priests, guided the clergy in their instruction of the laity regarding marriage and sexual conduct.[58] Diocesan synods were, perhaps, more effective in educating the clergy. However, since attendance at these events was irregular, we cannot assume that all parish priests had an adequate understanding of the reformed definition of marriage or that what they taught their parishioners was always entirely correct.[59]

The success of these changes also hinged on ensuring that the laity knew about and understood the church's definition of marriage. Sermons were a regular vehicle for educating the laity although they focused more on the church's ideal of marriage than on its rules about what constituted a legal

and valid union.[60] In defense of honorable marriages celebrated with the approval of church and family, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux proclaimed, "Take away from the Church honorable marriage and you also do away with the stainless marriage bed."[61] Bernard thus assured his listeners that, contrary to the claims of the heretics, marital sex within legitimate marriage could be sinless. Some sermons preached to the married, however, articulated the canonical idea that proper sexual intimacy within marriage was a duty. James of Vitry, for example, argued that marriage had been instituted in Paradise as a remedy for fornication and that rendering the debt was a mutual obligation based in Scripture.[62] In addition to sermons, the Church used ecclesiastical courts and parish visitations for educational purposes. These disciplinary measures were instituted to ensure proper behavior and reform of the clergy, but some bishops also used them as an opportunity to teach the laity about new laws on marriage.[63] The ritual of marriage itself also acted as a teaching device. By the early twelfth century, ordines from Normandy included an interrogation of the couple intended to ensure that both parties were entering the union willingly and a public reading of the banns to determine that the marriage was free from any impediment.[64]

Finally, in order to ensure lay compliance with the church's moral codes, the bishops developed new systems of control and supervision at the diocesan and parish levels aimed directly at reforming the sexual lives of the laity. In the early thirteenth century, for example, the church attempted to curtail fornication, that is, heterosexual intercourse between two unmarried persons (which many people still did not consider sinful) by implementing an institutionalized system of reporting.[65] Parish priests were instructed to notify their dean if they became aware of notorious fornicators in their parish. The dean then reported this to the archdeacon who was responsible for meting out punishment or taking further action.[66]

Regulations governing churching were, likewise, enforced through diocesan disciplinary systems and used as a means of discipline. The statute issued by Bishop Gellent of Angers in 1270, quoted earlier, mentioned a prohibition, apparently already in place, against the churching of women whose husbands were aggravated excommunicates.[67] A similar restriction was placed on women in legislation issued by Simon of Bucy, bishop of Soissons, in 1403. Concerned with the practice of usury in his diocese, the bishop declared that if after three warnings from the priest a man still refused to give up the practice of usury and make proper amends:

> It should be said to him publicly, in the church, by the priest, that if he has requested the sacraments of the church they will not in any way be given to him, nor shall his wife be admitted for purification when she rises from

> childbirth; and so the sacraments of the church should be refused to him until he has [renounced the usury] as stated above.[68]

A sentence of simple excommunication could be given for a variety of offenses but generally only affected the excommunicated individual. Stubborn sinners, however, who refused to mend their ways even after repeated warnings by ecclesiastical authorities, were considered contumacious or aggravated excommunicates. The families of such sinners suffered with them.[69] Bishops also thought of usury as evil and not a fit occupation for Christian men. Contact with these sinners could result in a charge of minor excommunication, which could, in turn, lead to a loss of access to the sacraments of the church.[70] Thus, the wives of men charged with aggravated excommunication or usury, by living with their husbands and faithfully performing their duties as wives, could be denied purification. The logic of such legislation was, presumably, that women were so anxious to receive a proper churching that they would pressure their wayward husbands to mend their ways and submit to ecclesiastical discipline.

The social impact of such legal developments, as well as the intellectual and religious changes of this period, was enormous and varied. Distinctions between the educated and uneducated, rich and poor, urban dwellers and their rural neighbors became larger and more perceptible. Some groups, including heretics, lepers, prostitutes, and homosexuals, were identified as unfit. In some instances, they were treated with fear and hostility and moved to the margins of society. Further, because, of the Church's efforts to clarify and redefine marriage, it was now possible to clearly distinguish between the married, the improperly married, and the unmarried. This set of distinctions also had social repercussions, especially in the celebration of churching.

The exclusion of specific groups of mothers from solemn churching may, indeed, be a reflection of the phenomenon of social categorization and persecution of "out-groups" noted by scholars of this period such as John Boswell and R.I. Moore.[71] Both Boswell and Moore rejected previous scholarship that explained the persecution of minorities as a normal response to the identity or behavior of the persecuted group. Boswell was arguing against the assumption that intolerance for male homosexuality in the Middle Ages was inevitable and unsurprising given the influence of Christianity on medieval society and the "fact" that homosexuality is "unnatural."[72] He was, however, more successful in raising the question than in providing a solution. In a conclusion that Boswell himself recognized as vague and unsatisfying, he identified intolerance of homosexuality in the Middle Ages as part of a general phenomenon of intolerance, a response to social tensions created by the rapidly changing world of the

twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Moore cast his net more widely and was interested in the phenomenon of persecution itself rather than in any particular group. Like Boswell, he rejected the explanations offered by earlier historians, who explained the persecution of heretics during the eleventh and twelfth centuries as a "natural" reaction to an increased number of heresies at that time,[73] and looked instead at the persecutors: who they were, what they gained by labeling and attacking a minority, how they used persecution to shift the balance of power in medieval society. Moore located the responsibility for institutionalized persecution in the rising class of literate clerks who, in the twelfth century, began to replace noble warriors as the confidants and advisors of kings, bishops, and popes. For Moore, persecution was thus the dark side of enormously important changes that shook Western European society in the twelfth century.

The regulation of churching in the thirteenth century reveals a similar pattern. Like Moore's literate clerks, the bishops who initiated the regulations and the clergy who administered and policed them had much to gain by emphasizing the value of marriage as they defined it and by imposing that definition on the Christian community. By consistently identifying women whose sexual behavior was outside the limits of this definition, the clergy reiterated and strengthened the Church's image of marriage and defended the boundaries that surrounded it. By gaining authority over marriage, bishops and priests exercised a form of social control that had previously been in the hands of fathers, nobles, and kings.[74] They also reaffirmed the distinction between the celibate clergy and married laity, a distinction that was of particular importance to the clergy, as we have already seen. By assuming control over lay sexuality within marriage, the bishops asserted their superior moral purity and thus enhanced both the spiritual and secular authority of the Church.

The regulation of churching, then, appeared in the context of important and influential changes. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, reformers worked to eliminate clerical marriage and made clerical celibacy a key to the Church's claims of moral authority. In response to the threat of heresy and informed by the intellectual renaissance of the twelfth century, the Church redefined marriage. At the same time, it managed to strengthen Church discipline and reorganized its own disciplinary system. Bishops made a concerted effort to educate both the clergy and the laity about the Church's views on marriage and used Church discipline to enforce compliance with these views. By gaining control over marriage, the Church was able to exercise authority over the laity in ways it had not done before. Like the new class of literate clerks in Moore's study, bishops in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries found themselves in a new position of power.

Their ability to regulate churching, along with other aspects of the moral and sexual lives of the laity, was an expression of that power, based in clerical celibacy and the clergy's claim to sexual purity.

Finally, this new understanding of churching was not only expressed and enforced through ecclesiastical law and discipline but also liturgically. In the manual for Sens, printed in 1500, the liturgy of churching is placed immediately after the marriage rite, which, interestingly, included a blessing of the marriage bed.[75] More significantly, a version of the ritual found in two texts from Cambrai placed a modified prayer for purification immediately after or actually within the rite of marriage. The earlier text is from the manuscript of a fourteenth-century *rituale*, written perhaps in 1364, and the later one is from a manual for Cambrai printed in 1503.[76] In both texts from Cambrai the rubric introducing the rite begins: *Quando nova nupta messiatur.* The verb *messiare*, like the associated French word *l'amessement*, is difficult to translate, but, according to du Cange, refers to the mass for a woman after childbirth, that is, her churching.[77] The rubric can thus be read, "When a new bride is being churched." The rite is intended for a woman who is being churched on her wedding day.

The existence of this rite seems to suggest that the problem of women needing purification at the time of their marriage happened often enough to require the creation of a special rite to meet the need. Such a situation might arise when a couple who had been living together, perhaps in concubinage or without the blessing of a formal marriage, decided to regularize their relationship.[78] Such informal unions were common, perhaps even the norm, among the poorer segments of society. A couple might live together until the woman conceived and only then formalize the union. The church strongly encouraged such regularization and the woman's desire for purification might have served as an added incentive to move couples in this direction. A rite that first married the woman and then offered her purification immediately afterward might have served to underline the Church's redefinition of churching as a privilege for married women. The couple first conformed to the Church's ideal of marriage and only then was the woman allowed to be churched.

The problem of women needing purification on their wedding day was apparently solved in many other places by the priest saying two masses, one for the marriage and another for the purification. But this solution was less than ideal for it required a priest to say more than one mass on the same day, a practice the bishops were trying to eradicate.[79] Efforts to curb this abuse appeared as early as the twelfth century but some priests clearly continued the practice in spite of repeated episcopal condemnation. A statute issued between 1300 and 1304 for the province of Reims and reiterated in a diocesan statute of Amiens in 1454 tried to limit the practice

by exhorting priests not to say two masses in one day except in cases of necessity such as burial, marriage, and purification after childbirth.[80]

The combination of the marriage rite with the rite of purification is unique to Cambrai and may have been instituted to avoid the problem of multiple masses. Between 1300 and 1310, the bishop of Cambrai issued a statute stating: "no priest should presume to admit any woman to her mass of purification on the day on which he has celebrated and solemnized a marriage between herself and her husband except by special license from us or our official."[81] Instead, the manual for priests of the diocese inserted a very short purification rite at the end of the mass for marriage, combining the two rites into one.

This short rite consisted of a few versicles and responses and the following collect: "All powerful and merciful God, grant that this new bride, having been purified and cleansed in both soul and body, may so serve you on earth that she may be gathered among your saints and chosen ones in heaven. Through Christ our Lord. . .Amen."[82] Following this prayer, the fourteenth-century rite concludes the service with a blessing: "Deign, Lord, by your heavenly benediction to bless and sanctify this new bride, and all those gathered here. In the name of the Father. . .Amen."[83] In the manual of 1503, the collect and blessing are followed with a final aspersion of the bride. The petition asking God to purify and cleanse the bride in soul and body and the aspersion at the end of the 1503 ritual make this clearly a rite of purification. Placing this rite immediately after or within the rite of marriage strongly suggests that the purpose of the purification was to remove any form of pollution that might stand in the way of consummating the marriage. In this context, churching helped to ritually transform a woman into a wife.

The marriage rite itself contained some elements in common with the ritual of churching. As the bishop of Meaux stated in his statute of 1493, a woman coming for purification was met at the church door by the priest who then led her into the church. Similarly, marriage began at the church door and the couple, like the new mother, was led into church by the priest.[84] Once the couple was inside the church, they heard mass just as new mothers did on the day of their churching. Like a new mother, the spouses were given *pain bénit* that had been blessed at the end of the mass using the same formula found in the rite of purification.[85] They were also sprinkled with blessed water, either before they entered the church[86] or sometimes near the end of mass in connection with a final blessing that included the Gospel of John.[87]

Many of these were common liturgical elements and therefore it is not surprising to find them in both the marriage rite and the full rite of churching, which is examined in chapter 4, though they were not part of the abbreviated

rite of churching for a bride. It may be that since the bride was brought into church by the priest, offered *pain bénit*, and heard the Gospel of John, it seemed unnecessary to repeat these elements in her purification at the end of the mass. It is noteworthy, however, that in the manual from 1503 the bride was aspersed again at the end of her purification, even though she and her husband had been aspersed earlier as part of the marriage ceremony. This repeated purification was meant only for the bride whose sexual receptivity was thus assured.

A very similar association of the bride with sexuality can also be seen in the nuptial blessing, the one prayer in the marriage rite said especially for the bride and only once in her lifetime, no matter how many times she was married. A statute of Soissons from 1334, for example, prohibited giving a woman the nuptial blessing more than once because it was not a repeatable sacrament (*hoc enim non est interabile sacramentum*).[88] This logic suggests that, like baptism, the nuptial blessing was thought to affect the woman in a permanent way that need not and, therefore, ought not be repeated. The nuptial blessing asked that God grant a new bride all the strengths and virtues of the holy women of the Hebrew scriptures: may she be loving like Rachel, wise like Rebecca, long-lived and faithful like Sarah.[89] The prayer asks that "she be true to one husband and fly from unlawful companionship," that she be "graceful in demeanour and honoured for her modesty."[90] In other words, the nuptial blessing, like the prayer at the churching of a new bride, expressed the hope that she "would so serve [God] on earth that she might be gathered among [His] saints and chosen ones in heaven." The rite of purification for a new bride, especially situated as it was after a marriage rite in which the nuptial blessing may have been read, created a proper wife who was submissive, obedient, and faithful.

The nuptial blessing ended with the request that the woman be fruitful and live to see her children's children in the generations to come. One of the purposes of the ritual of purification was to enable a woman to resume sexual intercourse with her husband. It made her free to take up the role of faithful and fruitful wife, to return to the bed of her husband where she would hopefully conceive another child. The ritual, linked as it was in Cambrai to the rite of marriage, made the association between churching and marriage explicit. Moreover, this connection would have been obvious to women and men of the Middle Ages. They would have recognized the similarities between the two rites since both rituals were performed at the parish and in public. They understood that churching brought a woman back to her duties as a wife insofar as that meant she returned to her husband's bed. In these ways, the churching of a bride worked admirably to reinforce the Church's ideal of marriage, though the effect of the ritual went beyond these public and social functions to work in more subtle ways.

Churching a new bride also connected the woman's sexual identity with her body. The rite focused attention on her physical pollution, which required cleansing and healing in order to assure her receptivity and fertility. In the context of the marriage rite, the importance of the woman's body is powerfully highlighted. It is her ability to conceive and bear children that is prayed for in the nuptial blessing and secured by the purification of churching. Here the ritual serves as a kind of fertility rite, pointing to the abundance and possibility in the woman's body and directed at bringing that possibility to fruition.

The churching of a new bride thus emphasizes for us a characteristic of the general rite performed for a woman after the birth of every child. Churching changed a mother back into a wife, creating and recreating the category of the properly married woman. This was an essential category, for without women properly married and under male control the established social order would be threatened. The ritual encouraged a woman to reassume this role after every child, redirecting her attention from her children back to her husband. It reminded her, and the entire community, that this was her primary identity, the one to which she must always return.

The ritual for the purification of a bride suggests that the bishops' legislation on churching successfully transformed the rite into one that protected marriage. By the end of the Middle Ages, this was generally the case. The laity gradually adopted the church's views on marriage and used the event of a mother's churching as a celebration of the family. In spite of this, clerical language about churching continued to frame it almost exclusively in terms of pollution and purification.

CHAPTER 3

QUIA POLLUTAE ET PECCATRICES ERANT: CHURCHING AS PURIFICATION

In his treatise on the virginity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the twelfth-century theologian Hugh of Saint-Victor defended the idea that Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Christ by asserting that she conceived not through human seed but through the Holy Spirit. Further, he argued that because she conceived without lust, she was able to give birth without pain and suffering. Women who conceived by the seed of their husbands, however, had a different experience. For them, Hugh wrote:

> Rightly, indeed, is integrity corrupted in giving birth because virginity is polluted in conception. It was just that [a woman] could not give birth without pain because the conception was not without lust. Bearing a child would not bring suffering in any way if conception had not felt like lewd passion. For if the guilt of illicit delight did not pollute [a woman] conceiving a child, the punishment of pain would not torture her in giving birth.[1]

Hugh's argument drew on a traditional set of associations that connected intercourse and the conception of a child with lust and then connected lust with sin and its consequences such as pain and suffering.

Earlier in the twelfth century, in a sermon for the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary, the eloquent teacher and theologian Peter Abelard drew on the same set of associations to explain Mary's freedom from the Mosaic requirement of purification after childbirth. After stating that both Mary and her son followed the law out of humility rather than necessity, Abelard explained:

> [the Lord's] mother observed the law of purification in the manner of other women; she in whom there was nothing to be purged was nonetheless purified. For the virgin who conceived and gave birth by the Holy Spirit owed

> nothing to the law in the rite of purification. . . .So truly the rite in sacred law is enjoined for all those women who gave birth having received the seed of man, it is clearly shown that the virgin who conceived and gave birth is not in any way subject to this law.[2]

From the theological perspective of clerics such as Abelard and Hugh, Mary's association with the custom of churching, her willingness to endure purification even though she was not impure, was an act of humility. Abelard's argument implies that for ordinary women, subject to pollution and the loss of virginity, purification after childbirth was considered a necessity. Clerical writers throughout the central and later Middle Ages repeatedly made the same connections, linking purification with pollution, lust, pain, and necessity. These associations suggest that many clerics regarded churching as a divinely instituted custom that confirmed their belief in the dangers of sexuality and the inherent value of virginity. Although this argument was modified in the later Middle Ages in response to a more positive understanding of sex within marriage, the idea of churching as a rite of purification that sharply contrasted women's pollution and clerical purity remained constant. While this understanding of the rite did not contradict the bishops' redefinition of churching, the emphasis on pollution and purity served more to confirm clerical superiority rather than to honor marriage.

As mentioned earlier, clerical authors often expressed their opinions about purification after childbirth in the context of sermons, including *ad status* sermons for the married, but especially those prepared for the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary. Sermons on the Purification drew heavily on theological sources, particularly for the development of important themes such as Mary's perpetual virginity and her freedom from obligation to the Mosaic law. Like the authors of sermons, theologians such as Paschius Radbertus and Thomas Aquinas used the sinfulness and corruption of ordinary women as a contrast to Mary's virginity and holiness.[3] By arguing for Mary's virginity before, during, and after childbirth, the authors indirectly reveal their assumptions and beliefs about the processes and effects of ordinary conception and birth. These ideas, though perhaps not shared and certainly not articulated by the illiterate masses of French society, nevertheless influenced the way churching was practiced by the laity; but, while perceptions of purity and pollution affected the laity, sexual purity was a defining ideal for the clergy. Especially after the eleventh- and twelfth-century reforms, notions of purity profoundly influenced how the clergy thought about themselves, their role in the church, and the ritual of churching.

Because Luke's account of Mary's purification described it as a fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, clerics often returned to the passage in Leviticus12:1–8

when they wrote about or referred to the rite. The meaning of churching for medieval clerics was thus strongly connected with the Old Testament rite of purification, and clerical authors often framed their discussion of churching in terms of the biblical practice as they understood it. These same Old Testament purity codes, with their requirements for ritual purification, were adhered to by medieval Jews. In particular, Jewish women's purification after childbirth included bathing in a *mikveh*. It is difficult to know, however, how familiar the medieval Christian clergy were with contemporary Jewish women's rituals of blood purification. They might have known about the custom of *mikveh*, but they may also have been ignorant of this exclusively female and quite private practice.

Yet, a few sermons on the Purification use the word bathing when referring to the purification of women after childbirth. Two of these are from the twelfth century, one by Bernard of Clairvaux and the other by Maurice of Sully.[4] A third is from an anonymous fourteenth-century sermon.[5] Interestingly, all three are in the vernacular, which suggests a lay audience, although Bernard's sermon also exists in a Latin version.[6] In the context of explaining why the feast is called a purification when Mary had no need of such a rite, the sermons briefly discussed the custom of churching. Bernard's sermon states: "In the law it was written that a woman who had received the seed [of a man] and had given birth to a son remained unclean for seven days. On the eighth day, her son was circumcised. And from that time, intending to be purified and washed [*lavier*], she should refrain from entering the temple for thirty-three days. . ."[7] Bernard suggests that the rite of purification after childbirth included washing. Maurice's sermon, written between 1168 and 1175, includes a similar idea: "We call this the Purification because Our Blessed Lady, Mary, completed her lying-in [*gesine*] on this day as any other woman, not because she had need of lying-in [*gesine*] as other women, nor of bathing [*baignier*] nor of sprinkling with holy water, but because from the birth of the Lord until this day she wanted to keep to the custom of other women. . ."[8] The fourteenth-century text is almost identical, perhaps having been borrowed from the earlier, well-known writings of Maurice.[9] Bernard used the word *lavier*, to wash, whereas Maurice used *baignier*, to bathe, but the sense of using water to cleanse the woman's body is the same in both cases.

It is difficult to know how to interpret these passages. This language may only have been a rhetorical flourish employed by eloquent preachers to emphasize Mary's purity and to sharpen the contrast between her and ordinary women. She was clean, not fouled by birth and conception as other women were. On the other hand, it is also possible that Bernard and Maurice were preaching to lay audiences and chose a vocabulary that

reflected actual practice. Some Christian women of the twelfth century may actually have bathed as a preparation for their churching. Both Bernard and Maurice use a word for bathing and another term that more clearly signifies purification. Bernard says a woman is to be "purified and washed" and Maurice speaks of "bathing" and "sprinkling with holy water," that is, aspersion. The penitential literature of the early Middle Ages had advised the laity to bathe after having intercourse and before entering a church.[10] Perhaps the custom persisted in some fashion but, as far as I know, there are no other references to such a practice in twelfth-century sources.

There were several kinds of pollution that the ritual of churching was thought to cleanse: blood, semen, and sin.[11] Women were thought to be impure because of the bleeding associated with childbirth and also because of receiving semen during the act of intercourse. In addition, clerical authors considered postpartal bleeding to be dangerous for medical reasons. Finally, women were thought to need purification because of the sinfulness associated with the desire and passion of sexual intercourse, which had led to conception in the first place.

In one sense, each of these is a separate kind of pollution. Medieval clerics, however, often discussed them together or failed to differentiate clearly between them. Nor did they give any sense that one form of pollution was more dangerous or more pressing than any other. Depending on the context and purpose of the text, clerical authors might focus on blood, semen, sin, or some combination of these when discussing purification after childbirth. To understand the logic and meaning behind them, however, it will be helpful to consider each of them separately.

The notion of impurity due to blood was founded in both Scripture and medical lore. Medieval clerics associated the blood impurities resolved at churching with the Jewish notions of impurity found in the passage from Leviticus 12:1–8. As discussed earlier in chapter 1, Leviticus 12 is best understood in conjunction with Leviticus 15 since both passages deal with the purity codes for women experiencing a flow of blood.[12] The prohibitions and restrictions placed on menstrual women in Leviticus 15 are applied to postpartal women in Leviticus 12. This passage with its emphasis on blood impurity and childbirth served as the basis for many sermons on the Feast of the Purification. The idea that churching removed the pollution associated with postpartal bleeding is clearly connected to it.

Rabbinical writers, as we saw earlier, considered impurity after childbirth in highly gendered terms related more to cultic practice than morality.[13] Though medieval clerics' ideas about the meaning of postpartal pollution differed in some ways from that of the Rabbis, the similarities are striking. Medieval clerics, drawing on the same Scriptures and associations

as the Rabbis, used menstrual women as a symbol for all that was foul and unclean. Like the Rabbis, they were more concerned about the effects of menstrual and postpartal blood on others, especially men, than about the women themselves. Medieval clerical authors saw Christ's blood, shed at his circumcision and during his passion, as salvific whereas they saw menstrual and postpartal blood as polluting. At the same time, medieval clerics believed that any blood, men's or women's, spilt in a church or on sacred ground caused pollution. Even though the liturgist William Durand, writing in the thirteenth century, argued that it was not the fact that blood was spilt but the intention behind the act that caused the pollution, medieval people and, probably, many clerics continued to believe that it was the blood itself that polluted.[14] Such beliefs are important because they demonstrate the complexity of blood as a cultural symbol and suggest that such symbolic meanings had a broad hold in the intellectual environment of the Middle Ages.[15]

As in the passage from Leviticus, clerical authors linked the pollution of postpartal bleeding with that of menstrual blood, which some authorities considered to be inherently corrupted.[16] The *De secretis mulierum*, a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century work on medicine and natural philosophy, for example, described menstruating women as "so full of venom" that they poisoned children, caused mirrors to tarnish, and infected their sexual partners with leprosy and cancer.[17] Simply standing near such a woman could cause a man to lose his voice because of the dangerous humors flowing from her body.[18] The medieval source for these beliefs seems to have been Pliny's *Historia Naturalis*, which was known in western Europe through a work of Solinus, a Roman physician in the first century B.C.E., entitled *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*. Borrowing from Solinus, Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636) included the ideas about the evils of menstrual blood in his *Etymologies*. The twelfth-century decretist Rufinus, also relying on Solinus, used them in his *Summa*, and, in the thirteenth century, Albert the Great included them in his scientific treatise, *Quaestiones super de animalibus*.[19]

The scientific basis for these beliefs was the theory of humors, which medieval medicine used to explain normal physiology as well as some diseases.[20] The body was meant to have a balance of four fluids or humors: blood, phlegm, yellow or red bile, and black bile. The phenomenon of menstrual bleeding was due to an accumulation of humors caused by women's natural coolness. According to the medieval understanding of human physiology, food was "cooked" into blood in the liver. Because their bodies did not have the necessary heat to accomplish this transformation completely, women's bodies accumulated an excess of partially cooked food that was purged each month as menstrual flow. Monthly elimination of this ill-formed material kept women healthy. Albert the Great thought

that the periodic purging of poisonous humors kept women healthier than men and explained why they lived longer.[21] Failure to have a monthly period, unless a woman was pregnant, was cause for concern. Retaining this material could bring about illness. Albert also believed that morning sickness was caused by the retention of the menses by pregnant women.[22]

Thomas of Chobham was relying on this model when he explained, in his thirteenth-century manual for confessors, why a man ought to refrain from sexual intercourse with his wife during her menstrual period and after childbirth. "In the same way," he wrote, "it is dangerous to sleep with a menstruous woman because from this can be born leprous offspring. Similarly, it is most indecent to lie down with a woman in childbed while she suffers from an issue of menstrual blood since for a long time after giving birth women have a flow of unclean humors."[23] Thomas was clearly familiar with the medical notion of humors and used it to explain the prohibition against intercourse with a woman suffering a flow of blood.

Mary Douglas's concept of pollution and marginal material provides a useful paradigm to explain why these authors thought of menstrual blood, understood as insufficiently digested food, as a dangerous humor.[24] Douglas defines pollution as matter out of order: that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained.[25] Physical pollution can disrupt the pattern of health and cause disease. Spiritual pollution may disrupt moral behavior or patterns of proper human relationships and thus lead to sin or social unrest. In either case, pollution distorts order and organization and, therefore, is dangerous. In this worldview, marginal material, that is, matter that does not fall clearly within or clearly outside of the defined pattern, is particularly suspect. It exists on the boundary between order and disorder. Because of this, it has the potential to blur the boundaries that divide order from disorder, purity from pollution, and thereby destroy the fundamental basis of order and stability.[26] This explanation corresponds well with the medieval notion of menstrual blood as dangerous.

As partially cooked material, neither fully blood nor fully food, menstrual blood was both polluted and marginal. Its ambiguous, "unfinished" nature rendered it too flexible, readily subject to further change, and therefore corrosive and dangerous. Some thirteenth-century writers described menstrual blood as so highly mutable that it was capable of transforming material that came into contact with it in alarming and destructive ways. Thomas of Cantimpré, for example, believed contact with the menstrual blood retained by a woman during pregnancy could kill her unborn child. Only when it was filtered and purified by the liver and placenta could it safely provide the fetus with essential nourishment.[27] According to this viewpoint, menstrual blood was believed capable of harming not only an unborn fetus, but anyone exposed to this corrosive substance.

Prohibitions against sexual intercourse during a woman's period was common in clerical discussions of marital sex. A thirteenth-century sermon on marriage, for example, included menstruation among the times that intercourse should be avoided, but without offering any explanation.[28] Some clerics, however, made it explicit that this prohibition revolved, in part, around beliefs that such encounters posed a health threat. The thirteenth-century preacher James of Vitry associated menstruation with the birth of deformed children in a sermon for the first Sunday after Epiphany based on the Scriptural passage *Nuptiae factae sunt*, a text often used to preach on marriage and so intended for a lay audience.[29] Men are prohibited from approaching their wives during menstruation, he stated, because "then monstrous fetuses are conceived with misshapen limbs."[30] William of Auvergne, a thirteenth-century bishop of Paris, included a similar notion in his manual for confessors, but extended it to include postpartal bleeding. In a discussion of when a man should abstain from sexual relations with his wife, William stated:

> Similarly [you should abstain from sexual relations] during the time of pregnancy or purification after childbirth because, in the same way, it is dangerous to beget offspring then on account of the danger of leprosy and the risk of other diseases; what you beget during the time after childbirth are either born weak or are weakened after birth: it is evident that, for a limited time, the [sexual] use of your own wives is to be avoided.[31]

Robert of Flamborough, in the *Liber Poenitentialis* he wrote when serving as penitentiary at Saint-Victor in Paris (ca. 1208–13), made the same connection between menstrual and postpartal bleeding. Considering the times when the priest should advise sexual abstinence, including the period before purification, he stated that "during menstruation and [after] childbirth, many lepers and epileptics and those ill in others ways are begotten."[32]

Peter of Poitiers, also a penitentiary at Saint-Victor and a contemporary of Robert, took this a step further, suggesting that there was danger to the father as well as to any potential child. In a section dealing with the questions that should be asked of a penitent concerning sins of the flesh, Peter suggested the priest should ask:

> Also, if [the woman is] in childbed. Likewise, if [sexual activity has happened] during menstruation where there is also a danger to the body, both to the father on account of the threat of elephantiasis, and to the children because from corrupt seed is born corrupt fruit and almost always, as the physicians claim, either a hunchback or a paralytic or some other such thing. The Jews, since they do not approach menstruous women, are more rarely touched by the uncleanness of leprosy.[33]

The connection between menstrual and postpartal bleeding as well as the dangers presented to children and even to fathers are evident in all of these authors. The ritual of churching removed the physical dangers inherent in postpartal blood, making it both powerful and necessary for the safe resumption of sexual relations.

Views on menstruation, among medieval people or modern anthropologists, however, are far from hegemonic. The negative interpretation of menstrual blood, especially that found in *De secretis mulierum*, was not universal among medical writers. The classical authors whose works served as the basis for much of medieval medical theory differed in their attitudes toward menstrual blood. the Aristotelian tradition tended to be more negative, and the Hippocratic and Galenic traditions were more positive. Moreover, the Arabic sources through which much of this classical knowledge was reintroduced into Western medicine during the eleventh and twelfth centuries had few negative ideas about menstrual blood.[34] These medical traditions considered menstruation an essential component of women's health, more efficient than but similar to other methods of purging the body of excess blood, such as nose bleeds or hemorrhoids.

Modern analysis of menstrual beliefs and practices in premodern societies is likewise diverse. Even though Mary Douglas's ideas can help to explain some medieval attitudes toward menstrual blood, her theories ought not to be generalized. Anthropologists note that many cultures, contrary to Douglas's assumptions, have ambiguous or positive attitudes toward menstruation.[35] Indeed, the idea that menstrual blood was marginal and powerful may also account for its positive use in folk magic as an aphrodisiac and as a cure for certain conditions.[36] Hildegard of Bingen, for example, prescribed adding it to a man's bath as a cure for venereal leprosy.[37]

In spite of the diversity of medieval opinion on menstruation and the nature of menstrual blood, the idea of churching as a rite of purification rested on negative assumptions. The authors of confessors' manuals, although often familiar with medical texts or works of natural philosophy in which menstruation was not portrayed negatively, nevertheless used pejorative ideas about menstrual blood in their manuals in an apparent effort to explain sexual prohibitions in "scientific" and rational language.[38] Since the material in confessors' manuals intended for the use of parish priests was the same as that used in synodal statutes directed at parish priests, it is tempting to argue that such ideas were common among the parish clergy. Unfortunately, there is not enough evidence to support such a claim. It is unclear how much parish priests actually conformed to the demands of their bishops to read and become familiar with the directives found in statutes and manuals. Among the clerical elite, however, it seems that women's bleeding was perceived as foul and physically dangerous,

or that, at least, they used such language in their efforts to direct pastoral care.[39]

Like the Rabbis, medieval clerics also associated women's bleeding with other forms of filth and danger. Many sermons on the Feast of the Purification, for example, discussed the rite of purification, not so much as it related to women's churching, but as a symbol for a moral purging to which all sinners were called. The twelfth-century monk, Julien of Vézelay, followed this pattern when he spoke of menstrual blood with disgust, using women's monthly bleeding as a symbol for those who repeatedly slide into the filth of sin. As he wrote in a sermon on the Purification, "it is not possible to imagine anything more dirty, more deformed, anything which the human senses abhor more than the rags of a menstruous woman."[40] Though Julien goes on to say that the image of the menstruous woman and her filthy rags is not a condemnation of the woman who suffers from her monthly flow, his use of the image is nonetheless striking. In sermons such as this, women's blood becomes a symbol of the moral filth that Christians should despise and avoid.

Blood purification after childbirth was associated, then, with a sense of physical and moral danger. While it might be argued that this association was with the blood of childbirth, not with the mother herself, I would suggest that fear of a woman's bleeding condition could easily translate into a fear of women. Both the physical reality of blood with its connection to leprosy and the moral symbolism attached to it were powerful images. Both were foul and to be shunned. If a priest were aware of these connections, it is not difficult to imagine that his reaction would be one of avoidance, a reaction that was, as we shall see, acted out in the liturgy of churching.

On the other hand, if the rite of churching was believed to address these dangerous realities, it could be viewed as an important and powerful ritual. The purification of a woman removed the threat of disease, allowing her to safely return to her husband's bed and the possibility of conceiving a healthy child. The ritual of purification also acted as a purgation similar to the moral cleansing Julien of Vézelay and preachers like him urged upon their sinful listeners. The ability of churching to remove blood impurity, then, was not a small or insignificant matter but one with considerable consequences. This alone would have made it valuable in the medieval church; however, postpartal bleeding was not the only impurity that churching addressed.

Medieval clerics often spoke of churching as a purification of the pollution associated with sexual intercourse. Although there was also a concern about sexual pleasure and intention, the belief that sexual intercourse in and of itself created pollution from which a woman needed to be cleansed remained a part of the clerical beliefs surrounding churching.

It was an idea already ancient by the twelfth century, having been articulated by the Church Fathers in the early centuries of Christianity. In his sermon on the fifth day of creation, Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan, praised the ability of bees to retain their virginity by avoiding sexual intercourse. Thus, he argued, their strength was not sapped by lust nor were they thrown into turmoil by the pains of giving birth.[41] Virginity, he wrote elsewhere, consisted in "an integrity unexposed to taint from the outside."[42] As Peter Brown has noted, the idea of any mixing of categories, such as that of male and female in the act of intercourse, was repugnant to Ambrose.[43] Thus, he praised the virginity of Mary because her body had not been invaded by a male penis and her womb had not been polluted by any alien seed.[44] Augustine of Hippo, though he was primarily concerned with the loss of free will in the control of sexuality, nevertheless located the transmission of original sin in semen. He argued, "the nature of the semen from which we were to be propagated already existed [in Paradise]." Because of the fall, this nature was "vitiated by sin and bound by the chain of death."[45] According to Elaine Pagels, Augustine believed that semen transmitted sexual desire and, thus, argued that every person born through natural intercourse was tainted with sin from the moment of conception.[46] The early medieval penitentials' insistence that after having intercourse one ought to wash before entering a church reveals a similar belief that the physical act was a source of pollution.[47]

This connection between intercourse and pollution persisted and became a standard part of the medieval discourse on the virginity of Mary and her freedom from the need for purification after the birth of her son. The clerics rooted their argument in Leviticus 12:2. "A woman who, *having received the seed of man*, gives birth to a male will be kept separate like a menstrual woman for seven days." They focused on the sexual connotations of this phrase and expanded it, developing an explanation of churching based not so much on prohibitions due to blood but rather on the act of intercourse. Thomas of Chobham, for example, used this logic in a sermon on the Feast of the Purification preached in Paris around 1220.

> The blessed Virgin was not needing to be purified since she would conceive through heaven, that is, through the Holy Spirit, not through the seed of man. However, it was prescribed in the law that a woman who, receiving the seed [of man], gave birth to a male would be unclean; indicating by this that some woman would be giving birth without receiving seed. Therefore, the blessed Virgin purified herself in order to be obedient to the law that her son came not to destroy but to fulfill.[48]

Thomas's concern is Mary's purity, but he states this in terms of her freedom from the pollution of intercourse. He implies that, in contrast to

Mary, ordinary women are made impure by receiving semen during the process of conception.

Many medieval preachers used similar language and logic in sermons written for the Feast of the Purification. Gebuines, a twelfth-century bishop of Troyes, argued that "the law described as unclean a woman who gave birth having received the seed of man but the blessed virgin, who did not conceive in this way, did not need to be purified according to the law."[49] The thirteenth-century preacher, William of Mailly, wrote, "If a woman, by accepting the seed [of a man,] gives birth to a son she is unclean but Mary conceived the son of God not from the seed of man but from the Holy Spirit."[50] In the fourteenth century, the Dominican preacher James of Losanno stated that Mary did not need to follow the law of purification because "she did not conceive and give birth in the way of the rest of women, by receiving the seed of man."[51]

The unavoidable physical process of conception thus created an impurity that affected the bodies of all mothers, except the Virgin Mother of God. Ordinary women were polluted by an activity that was, according to the teachings of the Church, central to their lives as wives and mothers. The same clergy who described sexual intercourse as pollution also instructed wives to render the conjugal debt to their husbands whenever possible. Recall, for example, Thomas of Chobham's advice regarding the conjugal debt in his *Summa confessorum*. The solution to women's seemingly perpetual state of impurity was the rite of churching, which cleansed their bodies by removing the stain of sexual encounter.

This understanding of churching, however, although very common among clerical authors in their discussion of the rite, is not especially logical. If pollution from semen was a sufficient cause for purification, why was churching not required of women every time they had intercourse? One explanation of this apparent inconsistency is to recognize that the language of churching as a purification from sexual intercourse served almost as a trope, a vocabulary and set of ideas handed down from the early church, repeated, and respected as part of tradition. This is not to suggest that clerical authors of the central and later Middle Ages would have disagreed with the idea that intercourse was polluting. Yet, because this view of churching was closely connected to arguments for the perpetual virginity of the Blessed Virgin, it was more a reflection of orthodox Marian theology than of a concern for resolving the pollution of married women.

When taken in conjunction with the notion of churching as a response to blood pollution, however, clerical language about the pollution of sexual intercourse reveals a deeper concern. While clerical authors had other ideas about the meaning of churching, including healing and privilege for women, the notion of it as purification was by far the most common and

persistent. By stressing that churching was a rite of purification, regardless of any inconsistency in their logic, the clergy identified women as the polluted "other" against whom their own purity could take shape. This representation of women had a long history going back to, at least, the third century. Historically, fear of women's polluting blood was used as an argument against women's involvement in liturgy and access to ordination; such restriction were embedded in canon law.[52] In contrast to women whose active sexuality resulted in their exposure to filth and contamination, the celibate clergy were spotless. Scholars have argued that the need to reinforce this heightened sense of purity became vital to clerical identity in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, in the midst of the push for reform of the married priesthood.[53] In the face of constant resistance to priestly celibacy by members of the lower clergy and frequent charges of clerical lechery in the later Middle Ages, the need to assert the purity of the clergy must have remained strong. Repeatedly speaking of churching as a rite of purification from the consequences of sexual activity and pregnancy was one way the clergy could reaffirm their distance from these activities and, thus, their own purity. The language of churching as purification served the needs of the clergy while also conforming to both patristic tradition and the demands of orthodox theology.

In addition to understanding churching as a response to pollution, clerical authors sometimes described churching as purification in another sense. Building on the belief that sexual intercourse was almost always sinful, medieval preachers described churching as a purification from sin. Churching not only resolved the pollution created when women engaged in sexual activity with their husbands but also the sin that came from sexual desire and the enjoyment women felt during the act of intercourse.

The medieval idea that intercourse was often sinful was deeply influenced by Augustine. For Augustine, because sexual desire operated without conscious will, it was proof of humanity's fall from grace. The experience of arousal, even if not acted upon, was itself sinful because it defied all man's efforts at control. Only the conception of Christ in Mary's womb, according to Augustine, was without sexual desire and thus without any taint of sin.[54] Though he upheld the goods of marriage and believed that married intercourse for the sake of procreation or to avoid incontinence was "the good use of a bad thing," Augustine's fundamental suspicion of sex and his identification of sexual desire with original sin deeply influenced medieval thought on sex and marriage.

Sermons for the feast of the Purification from the sixth to the twelfth century reflected the idea that sexual desire was sinful by arguing that Mary was free from fault because she conceived without lust. She, therefore, had no need for purification. A sermon attributed to Fulgent, a sixth-century

bishop in North Africa, declared: "It is evident to all the faithful that the mother of the Redeemer did not by any means contract uncleanness from his birth on account of which. . .she should be purged because the virgin gave birth without any human desire and without any corruption of the body and she remained a virgin to the end."[55] In the twelfth century, the Cistercian monk, Aelred of Rievaulx, declared that Mary was free from all impurity and all fault. She conceived and gave birth while remaining a virgin and "thus the Lord Jesus was born and conceived without any desire, without any pleasure of the flesh, without any defilement."[56] In contrast, as Fulbert of Chartres wrote in the eleventh century, "other mothers fulfilled the precept of Purification and sacrifice out of necessity because they were polluted and sinners."[57] Thus the rite of purification after childbirth was associated with removing the stain of lust and sexual pleasure that women experienced during the conception of their children.

This understanding of the rite may have been why the clergy considered it a sacrament rather than only a blessing. By removing the stain of lust associated with conception, churching approximated the sacrament of penance and its ability to forgive sin. Thus the bishop of Cambrai allowed the churching of a woman in danger of dying in childbed because the rite forgave the stain of lust just as rites of Extreme Unction and prayers for the sick and dying customarily offered the ill person the opportunity to confess. Here again, churching appears as a very powerful and important ritual in the eyes of the clergy. No doubt this explains in part the bishops' keen interest in protecting churching as a right of the parish so that they could control it and ensure its proper administration.

In the thirteenth century, some sermons on the Purification began to use an expanded form of the idea that churching forgave sin. Rather than simply declaring that Mary was free from sin because she conceived without lust, some preachers explained that Mary was free from all kinds of sin. The Dominican preacher Gerard of Mailly stated the idea particularly well. "For she did not deserve purification who had in her no stain of any kind. Indeed, there are three kinds of uncleanness which had no place in Mary, namely, the uncleanness contracted from [our] parents, the uncleanness acquired through wicked deeds, and the uncleanness made known through rituals."[58] Mary was free from original sin, *ex parentibus*, because of God's grace. Further, she did not acquire any impurity, *ex pravis actibus*, from wicked acts. She lived a faultless life, free from all sin. And finally, because she did not conceive from the seed of man and was not polluted by postpartal bleeding, Mary was free from impurity *ex cerimonialibus indicta*; that is, the legal or ceremonial pollution contracted by all Jewish mothers according to the Mosaic law and resolved by a ritual of purification. Ordinary women, of course, who suffered under the full weight of Eve's curse, fell far short of this.

Similar elaborations on Mary's freedom from sin appear in a number of French sermons from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Some of them, such as those of William of Mailly,[59] Guy of Evreux,[60] James Duèze (Pope John XXII),[61] and Peter Roger (Pope Clement VI),[62] developed the idea of Mary's complete sinlessness. Guy of Evreux, for example, speaking of the requirement for purification in Leviticus, wrote:

> The law was. . .for those who conceived from a man and who were sinners; this [woman] did not conceive from a man but by the action of the holy spirit; she was not a sinner. Indeed, such a remarkable [woman] is not stained in three ways; namely by original [sin] from which she was purged in the womb of [her] mother, by actual sin either venial or mortal which she never had, [or] third by legal sin.[63]

Others noted that Mary's freedom from original sin left her immune to the temptations and evils of sexual passion. Because she was untouched by original sin, reasoned Nicholas of Aquavilla in a fourteenth-century sermon, all fire of desire was extinguished and she was freed from the possibility of sin so that she had no need for purging or purification.[64] The authors of these sermons seem to have felt it important to make clear not only that Mary felt no lust but also that hers was a uniquely sinless life. No ordinary mother could aspire to such perfection.

The appearance of such elaborate arguments in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is important. It suggests that the traditional articulation of Mary's freedom from the sin of lust was no longer adequate or satisfactory. One explanation for this development was debate on the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception, which had started much earlier but became especially heated during the central Middle Ages, especially from the fourteenth century.[65]

Another explanation, however, is the twelfth- and thirteenth-century debate over the place of intercourse in the life of married couples. Spurred by eleventh-century ecclesiastical reforms that had finally secured the Church's control over marriage, theologians and canon lawyers discussed and argued over when and under what circumstances sexual intercourse was sinful. The question of sexual desire, deeply influenced by Augustine's opinion that desire was the consequence of original sin, was unavoidably connected with this debate. Theologian Peter Lombard (ca. 1096–1160) and the decretist Huguccio (ca. 1188) followed the opinion of Augustine. While Peter Lombard considered intercourse for the sake of children or to render the conjugal debt sinless, he believed it nearly impossible to keep desire within these limitations. Thus, intercourse without sin was theoretically possible though not likely for most Christians. Huguccio, taking a

harsher view, argued that since sexual desire was the result and sign of original sin, and since intercourse was impossible without desire, every act of intercourse was at least slightly sinful.[66] On the other hand, Peter Abelard (ca. 1079–1142) and Albert the Great (ca. 1208–80) maintained that sexual pleasure and desire were natural and thus not intrinsically evil.[67] Albert went so far as to assert that sexual pleasure in Paradise had been greater than after the Fall, though his views failed to gain much support.

The majority opinion fell between the extremes of Huguccio and Albert. Most clerical authors held that sexual intercourse within marriage was usually but not always sinful. The degree of sinfulness could be modified if the couple had the intention of producing children, guarded as much as possible against enjoying the act, and limited their sexual activity according to the days and times allowed by the Church. But marital intercourse remained a source of temptation and sin was a distinct possibility.

Within the context of this debate, the notion of churching as a purification from the sin of sexual desire apparently became problematic. As theologians argued over exactly what made intercourse inside of marriage sinful, with some actually arguing that sexual desire was no sin at all, the claim that Mary was free from sin only because she conceived without sexual desire seemed insufficient. Perhaps because of this, some preachers in the thirteenth and fourteen centuries developed a more detailed argument about Mary's freedom from all forms of sin: original, actual, and legal. Ordinary women, who could conceivably engage in sinless intercourse with their husbands, could never be considered free from all forms of sin and, therefore, still required purification after childbirth. Thus, as views on the sinfulness of marital sex grew more lenient, the ability of churching to forgive sin grew stronger. Interestingly, this development did not diminish the clergys' ability to use women's sinfulness as a foil for their own purity.

There is no direct indication in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sermons I examined that the debate over marital intercourse shaped the discussion of sin and purification, however, a fifteenth-century sermon by Vincent Ferrer makes this connection explicitly.[68] Vincent was an Italian Dominican and a gifted speaker whose preaching was extremely popular throughout western Europe. He traveled and preached widely and spent several years at the end of his career working in Normandy and northwestern France. His sermon on the Purification of the Virgin, which could well have been addressed to a lay audience given Vincent's career as an itinerant preacher, provides a particularly critical portrayal of women's sins and their association with churching.[69] He began by quoting Leviticus and stating the customary argument that Mary did not need purification because she had not conceived through the seed of man. He went on to say, "But this is the question: Why did God ordain this law when it is no sin to engender

children in the state of matrimony?"[70] He thus makes it clear that, by the fifteenth century, the attitude of some clerics toward the ritual of churching had been influenced by earlier theological debates over the place of intercourse in marriage. Vincent's sermon also reveals, however, a rather jaundiced view of the rite that suggested a greater concern for clerical interests than for those of women. He paints a misogynistic portrait of pregnant women and new mothers presented in stark contrast to clerical status and virtue.

Vincent answered his rhetorical question by explaining that all the precepts of the law are included in the ten commandments and that these are broken by women in four ways: in action, omission, speaking, and thinking. Women commit these sins in the conception, pregnancy, birth, and raising of their children and therefore they need the ritual of purification.[71] Women sin by action during the conception of their children because many of them are moved to the sexual act like "a horse or a mule, a dog or a pig, following the appetites of the flesh" when they ought to behave like a preacher "who preaches and converts people to God so that they might fill Paradise with sons of God. Thus parents ought to have the intention of producing children of God for Paradise."[72] Vincent contrasted his insulting image of women as animals, mules and pigs moved by instinct, to that of the preacher, a man like himself with the human capacity for speech, who desires only that heaven be filled with souls for God. As a parent, women ought to be intent on producing sons of God, not acting out of sexual desire. Vincent opposes women's sexual desire for pleasure to the cleric's pastoral desire to save souls.

"Secondly," he continued, "women sin by omission while carrying [their children] because if at first they were doing penance, that is, fasting, saying prayers, making pilgrimages and other such things, they omit these entirely when they are pregnant." Rather than praying, seeking forgiveness and God's assistance for a safe delivery and healthy child, they become more demanding and care for themselves with greater delicacy.[73] In contrast to this, he explained, the Blessed Virgin increased her devotions when she was the receptacle (*custodia*) of the body of Christ, just as a priest is more devout when he carries a receptacle (*custodiam*) of the Eucharist.[74] Here Vincent presents priestly devotion in sharp contrast to the fastidious self-indulgence of pregnant women who attend to their own needs while neglecting the needs of the spirit. Using an image that had developed during the Gregorian reforms, he likens the cleric to the Virgin Mary because both have enjoyed the privilege of carrying the body of Christ.[75]

The third way that women sin and so need purification is in what they say while they are giving birth. "For, feeling the pain of giving birth, they say many useless and indistinguishable words when they ought rather

to hasten back to Christ saying 'Jesus,' and to the Virgin Mary, who gave birth without pain, and to the saints."[76] Moreover, Vincent explains, some of these women curse Eve and others curse their husbands. Others, in an apparent effort to avoid their marital obligation, pray for a way to avoid approaching their husbands.[77] Thus Vincent used the pain of childbirth to portray women as weak, irresponsible, and unable to control their tongues. Without any apparent sense of incongruity, he compared these women to Mary, who suffered no misery in giving birth, because the Lord came through her body without rupture or corruption as sunlight through a stained-glass window.[78]

Finally, Vincent claimed that women sin in the way they think about raising their children. They ought to be fearful and pray for their sons who could grow up to be sinful men who might even kill their mothers or do evil deeds for which they could be hanged and damned. Instead of praying, however, women think at first, "I have an heir" and then "I am a lady."[79] In contrast, when Mary understood that her son would suffer, she stored these words and pondered them in her heart. "Thus," Vincent concluded, "it is evident that the Virgin Mary did not sin in any way, not in action while conceiving [her son], not in omission while carrying [him], not in speaking while giving birth, nor in thinking while raising [him]. However, she wanted to be humiliated by keeping to the law of Moses as if she were unclean and a sinner like other women."[80] The ritual of churching, then, according to Vincent Ferrer, cleansed new mothers from a series of selfish and impious behaviors that he connected with pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood.

Vincent's misogynistic approach to women's need for purification reveals a personal insensitivity to and ignorance about pregnancy and childbirth. Even more revealing, however, is the way he positioned the clergy within the context of this sermon. He highlighted two privileges that belonged exclusively to the clergy, preaching and approaching the Eucharist, and contrasted them to the sinfulness of lay women. Women use words carelessly whereas preachers use them to bring others to salvation. Ignoring the life they carry in their wombs, women devote themselves to self-interest. Priests, on the other hand, are moved to greater devotion when they carry the Body of Christ, a privilege they share with the Blessed Virgin. This depiction of the rite, like the persistent image of women as polluted, used purification after childbirth to emphasize the superiority of the clergy. It also positioned churching in opposition to the Eucharist. Vincent portrays churching as a purification for the polluted and the Eucharist as a sanctifying ritual celebrated by the pure. This language, possibly used to address the laity, underlined a perceived chasm between female pollution and clerical purity. For Vincent Ferrer, and surely for other

clerics as well, churching was a divinely ordained custom, an act of humiliation to which Mary acceded "as if she were unclean and a sinner," and an opportunity to assure themselves of their superior status within the Church.

We see, then, in the writing of Vincent and other medieval clerics, that the idea of churching as purification was complex in the variety of its permutations and yet simple: women are polluted and so need to be churched. Clerics did not directly identify churching as a rite that honored marriage, but none of the notions expressed in their writings contradicted this episcopal and disciplinary definition. Instead, the belief in women's pollution strengthened the idea that women needed churching to continue their role as wives. This understanding of the rite also conformed to Scripture and the tradition of the Church Fathers. The fact that the explanation of women's pollution in sermons, theological treatises and confessors' manuals of the central and later Middle Ages was clearly based on sexuality rather than on desacration of sacred space is also important. Understanding pollution as sexual in nature allowed the rite to act as an affirmation of the superiority of a celibate clergy compared to the sexual impurity of the laity, especially of lay women. It is not surprising to find these ideas repeated frequently in clerical writings between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries.

There is, also, an interesting thread of physicality in clerical discussions of churching as purification from the contamination of intercourse and the bloody pollution of childbirth. This understanding of the rite identified women as creatures of flesh, inescapably embedded in their corporality. The focus on women's bodies also places clerical thinking about churching within a much larger discourse. Caroline Walker Bynum has argued that medieval clerics in the high and later Middle Ages were very concerned about bodies and their link with spiritual realities.[81] Examining the theological discussion of bodily resurrection in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Bynum has found a deep clerical concern for physical integrity and wholeness. She also notes that these men needed to experience the body as "the locus both of temptation and of encounter with the divine."[82] Sermons and treatises that discuss churching as a purification reveal a similar attitude toward the body. In their descriptions of churching, clerical authors seem to understand women's bodies as a source of temptation for women themselves, as well as for the men around them, since it was through their bodies that women experienced sexual desire and lust. At the same time, clerical authors believed that through the blessing of this sacred rite, women could be cleansed of sin and purified of bodily pollutions. Clerical authors saw churching as a means of moving women's bodies away from a sinful state of corruption and toward an ideal state of wholeness.

Within this context, the clerical understanding of churching was more than a reflection of and response to misogynistic attitudes and fears of women, which can be traced back to the Church Fathers. The rite offered clerics a way of dealing with the threat posed by women's physical and sexual presence. Churching was a solution, temporary and incomplete, to the problem of women's bodies and, at the same time, it reaffirmed the divine plan for the salvation of humanity in both body and soul.

There was, indeed, no single hegemonic meaning of churching to which all members of the clergy subscribed. Besides the difference between clerical writings and the bishops' definition, clerics also defined churching as a rite of healing and as a special privilege for women, ideas that are explored in later chapters. Clerical writers who used these images suggest a reverence for the mysterious workings of the divine plan and a focus on pastoral rather than political concerns. Notions of churching as a women's rite and a privilege for mothers were much closer to the lay understanding of the rite and, especially, to the attitude of women themselves. What all of these conceptions of the rite have in common, however, is an appreciation of churching as a powerful ritual, capable of dramatically affecting a woman both spiritually and physically. Many of these different and even contradictory ideas were expressed in the liturgy of churching as it was celebrated in fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century France.

CHAPTER 4

SALVAM FAC FAMULAM TUAM, DOMINE: THE LITURGICAL RITUAL OF CHURCHING

The liturgy of churching is often compared to the celebration of Mary's purification, an event portrayed in numerous medieval images and in illuminated books of hours. The book of hours made for Mary of Burgundy by a Flemish artist in the 1470s contains a beautiful yet traditional example of such images.[1] The image was set within a historiated letter at the beginning of the office for None, the fifth of the seven canonical hours. As was usually the case, this image conflated two stories, the Purification of the Virgin and the Presentation of Jesus, but did so in a way that gave Mary the most prominent role. When we look at this image, not even the divine infant attracts our attention away from his mother. Mary stands before the altar in the process of handing her son to the priest. Dressed in a long, blue robe, she is the central figure in the scene and the only one whose head is surrounded by a nimbus. Behind her we see a group of people, two women and a man who holds a lighted candle. The attention of this group is also focused on Mary just as our eyes are first drawn to her when we look at the illumination.[2]

This portrait of Mary at her churching, though rich and finely wrought for a French princess and English queen, contains elements that mirrored the churching of ordinary women in late medieval France. When a woman arrived at her parish church to celebrate the liturgy of churching, she was given pride of place. The parish community gathered to watch and witness. For this day and during this liturgy, the new mother was the focus of everyone's attention. At the end of the mass, she drew near the altar where the priest received her and offered her blessed bread. But just as a fine painting has layers of meaning that are often not obvious at first glance, so rituals

such as churching are laden with symbols and gestures whose significance goes beyond the self-evident.

This chapter explores the liturgical ritual of churching that was performed at the church in order to recover the rite itself but also to uncover its many layers of meaning. The extant liturgies are mostly from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries by which time the idea that the rite of churching honored marriage had been well established. The liturgy, however, expressed not only the official understanding of the rite, but also the ideas of women's pollution, clerical purity, and privilege of both priest and mother. To get at these various and sometimes contradictory meanings requires examining churching as a liturgy whose forms and rubrics presented powerful though traditional images to the medieval church and society.[3] In addition, it requires considering churching as a ritual in a theoretical sense as a critical encounter between opposing cultural and social forces with the ability to express ideas beyond those intended by its clerical creators.[4] When we consider churching in these ways, we find a complex ritual that expressed the ideas of purification and the ordered hierarchy of medieval community, but that also created the basis for social tensions. On the one hand, it established and protected clerical authority and set the boundaries between purity and pollution, between sexually active lay women and the celibate clergy. On the other hand, it pointed to the insecurity of the border between these realities and created the possibility of disorder by empowering women and granting them a place of privilege. These alternative meanings of the rite, though perhaps foreign to medieval thought and language, are nonetheless valuable as avenues for our understanding of the way churching operated in medieval society.

To my knowledge, there are only eight texts that contain churching rituals for medieval northern France.[5] They are all from the late Middle Ages, mostly in early printed editions of *manuales*, sometimes also referred to as *rituales*, from the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries.[6] Although there is no doubt that the ritual of purification after childbirth was being performed in many regions of northern France at least by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the evidence for this, as we have seen, comes from statutes. I have found no French liturgical texts for the purification of women after childbirth before the late fourteenth century. The most likely explanation for the lack of earlier texts is the relative scarcity of diocesan or secular *rituales* and *manuales*. In comparison to other liturgical books, such as missals, far fewer *rituales* have survived and many of those that have were created for a monastic community and were not intended for parish use.[7] It is possible, then, that the earlier liturgies of churching have simply been lost because manuscripts subject to frequent use, such as parish manuals, are the least likely to survive. Another possible explanation is that the earlier rite

was very simple or largely subject to local custom and, consequently, was not routinely written down. There is a pronounced increase in the number of extant rituals from the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[8] These late texts are all very similar,[9] suggesting that perhaps at that time there was an effort to regularize the rite, which resulted in the need to include an ordo for purification in priests' manuals. Whatever the explanation, the lack of early texts makes the development of the liturgical ritual of churching in medieval France impossible to determine with any certainty.

The *manuales* or *rituales* in which we most often find the rite of churching were liturgical books that contained all the non-Eucharistic rites performed by a priest.[10] Liturgical books of this type, independent of any mixture with other kinds of liturgical books, began to appear in the eleventh century.[11] They contained not only the rubrics for each ritual, that is, descriptions of the actions the priest performed, but also the prayers and Scriptural references for the readings. *Rituales* became much more common beginning in the thirteenth century when synodal statutes mandated that every priest should have his own copy of the local *rituale*. Throughout the Middle Ages and until the Council of Trent, the *rituales* remained flexible, always being adapted to local use.[12] Because of their nature and use, *rituales* or parish manuals reflect the "normal and regular worship of parish churches" better than other liturgical books.[13]

The earliest text of a French churching that I have been able to find is from a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century manuscript of a *rituale* for use at Cambrai, possibly written in 1364.[14] The other seven texts are from the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. One exists in an early-fifteenth-century manuscript of the Pontifical of Durand de Mende, probably copied in the cathedral chapter at Amiens but held now in the public library of Boulogne-sur-Mer.[15] The remaining texts were all included in *manuales* or *rituales* printed for use in a particular diocese. Fifteenth-century texts include one for use at Chartres, printed in 1490,[16] and one for Paris, printed in 1497.[17] Texts from the sixteenth century include one for Sens, printed in 1500,[18] one for Châlons-sur-Marne, dated to around 1500,[19] one for use at Cambrai, printed in 1503,[20] and one intended for the church of Reims, printed before 1505.[21]

The order of rites within the *rituales* differs somewhat from book to book; however, the placement of churching falls into three patterns. In the *rituale* from Sens, churching followed the rite of marriage, and in the *rituales* from fourteenth- and sixteenth-century Cambrai it was placed immediately after or within the rite of marriage and included the ordo for the purification of a bride. In fourteenth-century Cambrai, churching immediately preceded the rite of baptism. At Chartres and Boulogne-sur-Mer, it followed the rite of baptism or the blessing of the baptismal font. Finally, at Paris and

Reims churching was placed either before or after the prayers for the separation of lepers.[22] Walter von Arx has suggested that this diversity was the result of clerical confusion over the rite. Although churching was a blessing, he argued, the compilers of *rituales* had difficulty knowing where to place the rite and so it "is invariably found in section [*sic*] dealing with the sacraments."[23]

I argue that the variety of places churching was given in the *rituales* reflects the complex meanings of the ritual rather than clerical confusion. Because von Arx considered churching a blessing, he found it odd that the medieval clerics did not place it among the various blessings, such as those for fields, bells, or towers. Medieval clerics, however, thought of churching as an ecclesiastical sacrament, not a blessing, and the placement of the rite in their manuals reflects this understanding. In addition, the placement of churching reflects a variety of associations the rite had with other rituals. *Rituales* that placed churching after baptism connected the blessing of the new mother with the birth of her child. Since she was being cleansed of pollutions that were directly caused by the processes of pregnancy and giving birth, such a placement is not strange or confusing. This placement also underlines the ability of the rite to celebrate a legitimate birth. Placing churching at the end of the rite of marriage reflected its association with properly married matrons. The two *rituales* that placed churching near the prayers for lepers also included an abbreviated rite for the purification of women too ill to attend a public churching. In this context, then, churching emerges as a rite of healing since purification removed the threat of leprosy associated with menstrual and postpartal bleeding. As we shall see, all of these meanings are clear in the liturgy of churching and would have been available to the medieval clergy who performed the rite.

Variations in the forms of the liturgies also indicate the many meanings and associations churching had for medieval people. In the eight texts that contain a churching ritual, six (Chartres, Paris, Reims, Sens, Châlons-sur-Marne, and sixteenth-century Cambrai) provide a nearly identical rite, which always included a mass, the reception of *pain bénit*, and a final blessing. Three of these six rites (Paris, Reims, Châlons-sur-Marne) also included an option for the churching of a woman too ill to attend the public ritual. Both of the rites from Cambrai incorporated the churching of a bride into the marriage rite, whereas the text from Boulogne-sur-Mer includes only a rite of introduction at the church door. These adaptations, often existing alongside a fairly standard rite, suggest the different ways in which churching was understood and probably reflect local customs and the previous evolution of local practices. The adapted rite for a new bride, as we have already seen, reflects the strong association of churching with marriage. The rubric for ill mothers, which is fully explored in chapter 5,

indicates a concern for the dangers and health problems associated with childbirth. In the present chapter, we consider the rite of introduction at the church door and the ritual's most common elements: mass, the reception of *pain bénit*, and the final blessing.

For some women, churching began with a rite at the church door before mass. The Latin for this rite, *Ad introducendam mulierem in ecclesiam*, suggests its purpose: the introduction of a woman into church for the first time after she had given birth. The only French version of this rite that I am aware of exists in the early-fifteenth-century manuscript of the Pontifical of Durand de Mende, held now in the public library of Boulogne-sur-Mer. In addition to the manuscript at Boulogne-sur-Mer, a reference to such a rite is contained in the statute from Meaux issued in September 1493. In this statute, you may recall, the bishop stated that in his diocese married women who had stayed away from church after childbirth for a certain number of days, "are to be introduced [into the church] with an aspersion of exorcised water."[24]

The rite *Ad introducendam* in the Boulogne manuscript begins at the church door with the recitation of Psalm 23. The words of the psalm set the tone of the ritual: those who desire entrance into the sanctuary of the Lord must be innocent and pure of heart, eager to receive the blessing and mercy of God.

> The earth and its fullness is the Lord's
> The wheel of the world and the universe, and those who dwell there.
> For he established it upon the sea
> And settled it above the flowing water.
> Who can ascend the mountain of the Lord?
> Or who can stand in his holy place?
> The one with innocent hands and a clean heart
> Who does not entertain his mind with useless things
> Nor swear to his neighbor with deceit.
> Such a man receives a blessing from the Lord
> And obtains mercy from God for his well-being.
> Such is the generation that seeks him
> That looks for the face of the God of Jacob.[25]

This is followed by a short series of prayers, including the Lord's Prayer and the *Kyrie eleison*, a prayer begging for God's mercy. The versicles and responses that follow name the woman and address God on her behalf: "Lord, heal/save your maidservant, N., who hopes in you, my God. Send her help from on high and out of Zion defend her."[26] The priest then prays for the purification of the woman, saying:

> God, who through your son Moses commanded the people of Israel that a woman who had given birth to a son be kept from entering the temple, we

> beseech you, deign to purify your maidservant here from all defilement of sin, so that cleansed in soul as well as in body, she may be worthy to enter into the bosom of Mother Church and to make you an acceptable offering for her sins. Through Christ our lord. . .Amen.[27]

Notice in this prayer that the new mother is invited to enter "the bosom of Mother Church." This rhetorical association of the new mother who is the object of this prayer and the image of the Church as mother was surely not accidental. The language of prayer in the medieval Church was rich and there were many metaphors of the Church from which to choose.[28] The rite might just as easily have said the "body of Christ" or the "sanctuary of the Lord." Calling to mind the image of the Church as nursing mother in this context creates a sympathetic connection between the new mother and the Church and the prayer itself calls for the mother's purification. The prayer thus communicates a desire to nurture the woman and honor her role as mother at the same time that it affirms the belief that she is defiled by sin and in need of purification. Following this prayer, the priest sprinkles the woman with blessed water, to bring about the necessary purification, and then leads her into the church saying: "Enter the house of the Lord and adore the son of the Virgin who gave you the fruitfulness of children."[29] Combining all of these elements, this rite *Ad introducendam* is clearly a rite of purification dominated by the woman's need for cleansing both physically and spiritually, tempered somewhat by a certain sensitivity to the value of motherhood.

The most visible elements of this ritual are sprinkling the woman with holy water and leading her into church. Their visibility and the layers of meaning attached to them also makes them very powerful symbolic actions. These gestures clearly reflect the intentions of the rite: purification and reintroduction of the woman into the community.

The aspersion of the new mother would have been a potent symbol for her and the community. Water, after all, is a powerful symbol surrounded by a plethora of meanings. Eamon Duffy lists several dozen including purification, fertility, warding off evil, blessing, and cleansing.[30] Because of its symbolic richness, blessed water was a common part of many liturgical rites and was also frequently used as part of folk customs not necessarily approved by the clergy.[31] The most powerful kind of holy water was that used at baptism, distinguished by the elaborate form of its blessing. Water intended for use at baptism was customarily, though not exclusively, blessed during the solemn Easter Vigil service. The blessing included the prayers of the priest and also symbolic actions such as breathing over the water, dipping the paschal candle into it, and pouring in blessed oil.[32] There was another, more simple form of blessing water that involved only

the prayer of the priest. Water blessed in this way was used for nonsacramental rites. By the seventh century, the Western Church was using blessed water to guard homes and purify desecrated churches. In Brittany in the late sixth or early seventh century, Saint Malo cured by using water that had been blessed using a formula for exorcism.[33] In the fifteenth century, the priests at Meaux aspersed women with exorcised water before allowing them to enter the church. By exorcising the water and thus freeing it from any evil, it presumably became a vehicle for purification, cleansing, and curing illness. Indeed, the most common meaning of blessed water, especially when used as an aspersion, is cleansing or purification.[34] The aspersion of the congregation at the Sunday liturgy, a custom that dates back to the ninth century, was meant as a reminder of baptism, the ritual cleansing from the taint of original sin through which one became a member of the Church.[35]

In the context of the rite *Ad introducendam*, the aspersion seems clearly to be an act of purification. Like the water used in baptism, this aspersion cleansed the new mother from sin and pollution. It exorcised whatever corruption her body harbored and so may have suggested healing as well. As a reminder of her baptism, the aspersion recalled the woman's status as a member of the Church. Thus, sprinkling the woman with holy water was a powerful symbolic expression of the purpose of the rite: to bring the new mother, cleansed and whole, back into regular participation in her parish community.

The rubric does not specify how to bring the woman into church but only states "she should be led into the church."[36] A miniature accompanying the text in the manuscript, however, portrays this important gesture in the rite (fig. 4.1).[37]

The woman, dressed in a fur-collared, red robe and wearing a short, white veil, delicately holds onto the end of the priest's gold stole with the thumb and first finger of her right hand. The priest, holding onto the stole just above the woman's hand but not touching her, is already entering the building and looks back over his shoulder at the woman following him. The only other figure in the scene is another woman, dressed in an austere black mantel and robe, standing to the side in a posture of prayer, her arms crisscrossed over her bosom. She may represent the observing community, but her attire and her attitude communicate a somber, perhaps penitential, presence. The lack of touch between priest and woman accompanied by the grave presence of the single observer in the miniature communicates a distance and fear not found in the prayers and rubrics of the ritual.

If we take the miniature from Boulogne as a realistic representation of the rite, the priest's use of the stole to lead the woman into church was a powerful image and an eloquent gesture. It was also a strategic choice. By

Fig. 4.1 Pontifical of William Durand, historiated letter "O." B.M. Boulogne-sur-Mer, ms. 85, fol. 305r. Courtesy of Bibliothèque municipale de Boulogne-sur-mer (France)

leading the woman into church the priest did several things at once. He clearly demonstrated that the woman was rejoined to the community and was free to enter the sacred precincts once again. Moreover, by leading her into the building, he displayed his authority, his right to govern. And

finally, by using the stole to avoid touching the new mother, the priest also kept his distance, a distance that was not removed even by her purification just moments before.

Leading the woman into the church reiterated the purpose of the rite expressed earlier, the reincorporation of the new mother into the parish community. It underlined the importance of this community by emphasizing that participation in it was a privilege controlled and limited by ecclesiastical authority. Through its power of excommunication, for example, the Church could prohibit Christians from entering churches or joining in community worship. As a woman polluted by the process of childbirth, the new mother was denied access to the church and participation in the community until she was purified. In this respect, her pollution placed her in a temporary state of excommunication that the ritual of churching removed. With this barrier lifted, the priest led her back into the church, the symbolic heart of the Christian community.

Indicating her reincorporation through this ritualized gesture, however, expressed more than the woman's freedom to enter the church. No ritual gesture is accidental or arbitrary. Rituals are composed of carefully planned movements and words, orchestrated to achieve some specific end.[38] Leading the woman into church rather than simply allowing her to enter the church constituted a ritualized action that was designedly different from the usual and ordinary.[39] It created a relationship between the woman and the priest in which he held the position of authority. The action of leading not only expressed authority but actually created a leader. Conversely, the action of being led not only expressed subservience but actually created a follower.[40] Certainly this acted out the proper social order with a member of the laity following the guidance of the pastor. The action was also gender specific, for the priest would always have been a man and the new mother, a woman. Thus the action confirms the correct gender hierarchy as well: women securely placed under proper male authority.

Using the stole in a way that allowed the priest to avoid touching the new mother added a further dimension to the act of leading. It called attention to and exaggerated the distance between the two actors. It set the priest far above the woman and elevated his position in the hierarchy. It suggested that the distance between them was unbridgeable or that it ought not be bridged for fear of some dire consequence. The priest's avoidance of the woman's hand as he leads her into church is obvious and therefore striking. By using the stole as a safeguard, the avoidance is formalized and ritualized. It is connected to the symbol of the priest and his role as minister, a role that was defined in part by the priest's vow of celibacy. This revealing use of the stole brings to mind an *exemplum* or brief tale used by medieval writers, including James of Vitry, to demonstrate a moral or make a point. "So we read about a certain hermit who, when he wished to carry his

mother across a stream, covered his hands with a cloak. And when the mother took offense, saying, 'Am I not, after all, your mother?' he responded: 'Do not wonder at this, mother, for the flesh of woman is fire.' "[41]

In the liturgy of churching, the priest's stole acted like the hermit's cloak. It protected the priest from possible pollution by shielding him from the woman's body and the burning of sexual desire that might be prompted by her touch. The gulf that lay between the fingertips of the woman and the hand of the priest marked the difference between purity and pollution, both terms fraught with meaning. The rite marked the line between these opposite poles and made real the division of the community into the pure and the polluted. The creation of such social boundary markers is one of the characteristics of rites of passage as defined by Arnold van Gennep, or rites of institution as described by Pierre Bourdieu.[42]

Churching, and the rite *Ad introducendam* in particular, was a rite of passage. It marked a woman's transition from a state of exclusion and liminality to one of reincorporation. It reintroduced her to the parish community from which she had been separated by the process and aftermath of childbirth. Her polluted condition placed her in a liminal status as a wife who abstained from intercourse and as a believer who stayed away from church. As long as she held that status, she remained separated from the community. Now, through the prayers of purification, the aspersion with holy water, and with the permission of the priest, she was brought back into the sanctuary. Within that sacred space, she was once again allowed to join with her friends and relatives in the celebration of mass.[43] The ritualized act of leading her into church assured that she entered the sacred space with the full permission of the clergy. The public nature of the liturgy encouraged the community to attend, to pay attention to her return and be there to welcome her. The rite *Ad introducendam*, then, offered the priest the opportunity to exercise legitimate authority over a member of his parish and reinforced his status as protector of the church's purity. For the new mother, the rite at the church door removed the barriers that had kept her away from worship with her neighbors and publicly celebrated her right to full membership in the Christian community.

Although the manuscript at Boulogne-sur-Mer contains the only French version of the *Ad introducendam* that I am aware of, there are a number of versions from outside of France. Both *The Monastic Ritual of Biburg*, edited from a twelfth-century German manuscript now housed in Budapest, and the *Ritual of St. Florian*, also from a German twelfth-century manuscript, contain a rite *Ad introducendam*.[44] In his work on medieval blessings, Adolph Franz included seven ordines for this rite. All but one of these are from German-speaking sources.[45] Five are from twelfth-century German or Austrian sources and one from fifteenth-century Austria.

Franz's one non-German ordo is from the Pontifical of Archbishop Chichele, who held the see of Canterbury from 1414 to 1443.[46] This ordo follows the use of Sarum, that is, of Salisbury, England, although Franz mistakenly identified it with York.[47] Finally, the 1543 edition of the Sarum missal contains an ordo *Ad purificandum mulierem post partum ante hostium ecclesie*.[48]

All of these rites are quite different from the French version. What stands out, in fact, when one examines all of these rites is that no two are exactly alike. There is considerable variety in the choice of psalms and prayers and in the rubrics. The twelfth-century German rites tend to use different psalms, often specifically penitential in content, different prayers, and usually do not have an aspersion. The fifteenth-century Austrian rite (Ordo VI in Franz's collection) actually focused on the newborn child rather than the mother.

The two English rituals from the Sarum rite are closer to the French rite in that all three follow a pattern of psalms and prayers followed by an aspersion and a formal entrance into the church. In the ordo *Ad purificandum mulierem* of Archbishop Chichele of Canterbury, the prayer that is recited as the priest and the woman being churched enter the sanctuary is almost identical to the French, adding only a petition for eternal life and salvation.[49] Many of the same versicles and responses are used in both the French and English rituals.

There are, however, important differences. Both English ordines (as well as some of the German ones) use Psalm 120, which acclaims God as a guardian.

> I lift up my eyes to the mountain,
> From there my help comes.
> My help is from the Lord
> Who made heaven and earth. . . .
> With the Lord as your protection, at your right hand,
> The sun shall not plague you by day
> Nor the moon by night.
> The Lord guards you from all evil.
> The Lord shall guard your soul.
> The Lord shall guard your coming in and your going out
> From now and until forever.[50]

This brings into the ritual the image of God as a protector whose actions, in this case, have seen the woman through pregnancy and birth, saving her from difficulties and possibly from death.

The prayer said over the woman in the English rites is also different from that used in Boulogne-sur-Mer. The English prayer is a recognition of God's mercy in bringing her safely through the ordeal of childbirth rather

than a prayer of purification. In the Canterbury ordo, the bishop prays: "All powerful and eternal God who freed this woman from the danger of childbirth, make her to be devoted to your service so that, her path in life being faithfully accomplished, she may rest continually under the wings of your mercy and attain eternal peace."[51] The prayer in the Sarum missal is nearly identical. After this the priest, taking the woman's right hand in his own, leads her into church, thus adding an element of physical closeness carefully avoided in the French rite as depicted in the miniature from Boulogne-sur-Mer. The pontifical from Canterbury then continues the rite with mass followed by a final blessing and the reception of blessed bread.

Each version of the ritual at the church door, whether German, English, or French, is distinct. These rituals seem to have been shaped more by local concerns and attitudes than by a need to conform to any known model. What is unusual about the ritual in the Boulogne manuscript is its presence in France at all. There is no evidence that this particular custom of blessing a woman at the church door was widespread in medieval France. The location of the unique French ordo *Ad introducendam* in a region so closely associated with England makes it possible to imagine that customs on one side of the English Channel influenced practice on the other side. Where the custom originated, however, and who borrowed it from whom is not clear. It is certain that the rite at the church door was the most important element in the medieval English churching ritual.[52] However, given the concern of the French bishops echoed so strongly in statutes from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries that only proper women be admitted for purification, it is hard to imagine that no attention was paid to a French woman coming for purification prior to the beginning of mass. At the least, a priest would have greeted the women as they arrived and acknowledged that they were there for purification, if for no other reason than to ensure that no one came for her churching without the proper permission.

Assuming, for the moment, that some kind of blessing at the church door was done in some parts of northern France, the evidence suggests that local custom and regional differences would have affected the gestures and prayers of each rite. The rite *Ad introducendam* as it was done in Boulogne was probably different from that done in other parts of France. At Meaux, the only other city in which there is an indication that such a ritual was performed, there was an aspersion with exorcised water at the church door, which suggests some similarity with the rite at Boulogne. Still, there is ample room for difference. The possibility of such differences makes generalizations drawn from the analysis of any one rite particularly dangerous. The ritual from Boulogne-sur-Mer, therefore, offers us only an incomplete view of what a rite of introduction may have been like in medieval France and cannot be assumed to represent what was done in other churches.

In some places, the blessing of a woman at the church door may have constituted the entire rite of purification. In the pontifical from Boulogne, for example, the rite ends after the blessing and there is no suggestion of anything to follow. The absence of a further rite, however, cannot be taken as proof that nothing else followed, especially since it is most likely that the purified woman would have entered the church in order to participate in some sort of service. Adolph Franz also believed that it was the custom in France to proceed from the rite of introduction to a mass and the reception of *pain bénit*, or blessed bread.[53]

Attending mass was, in fact, central for the French rite of purification after childbirth. A vernacular term used to describe the liturgical ritual of purification was *l'amessement*. This word, which is very difficult to translate into English, referred to the mass a woman attended on her first day back to church after the birth of a child. It probably developed from the Latin *messiare*, which was used in the ordo for the purification of a bride. It sometimes occurs in fifteenth-century vernacular texts where it is synonymous with *relevailles*. In a letter of remission from 1475, for example, we find an account of a young man on his way to a churching feast. ". . .*la festaige de lamessement dune sienne fille qui estoit acouschee denfant*."[54] The substitution of the term *l'amessement* for *relevailles* reveals the centrality of the mass itself in the customs surrounding churching. The mass, rather than a blessing at the church door, seems to have been the most important element in the purification of most women in medieval northern France. This is corroborated by the ordines themselves, since all the French ordines for churching, with the exception of the pontifical from Boulogne-sur-Mer, begin with the mass.

To my knowledge, there are six extant texts of this rite, the *De purificatione mulierum post partum*, from medieval northern France. The rite *De purificatione* is included in the *rituales* from Chartres (1490), Paris (1497), Sens (1500), Châlons-sur-Marne (ca. 1500), Cambrai (1503), and Reims (before 1505).[55] These six texts, all from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries, provide us with a clear picture of the rite *De purificatione* in late medieval northern France since the rites performed in these various churches were very similar. All include the celebration of mass, a blessing for the mother, and the reception of *pain bénit*.

The rites all began with the same rubric and prayer.

> After childbirth, however, a certain number of days having passed as is the custom, the women [who are] to be purified come to church in order to hear mass. And so, at the end of the mass, with the woman standing near the altar, the priest, holding bread suitable for blessing, says:[56]
>
> Verse: Our help is in the name of the Lord.
> Resp: Who made heaven and earth.

Verse: Blessed be the name of the Lord.
Resp: Both now and forever.

Let us pray:

Bless, Lord, this creature of bread, as you blessed the five loaves in the desert, so that she who eats it, cleansed from sins, may attain health of soul and body. In the name [+] of the father and the son and the holy spirit. Amen.[57]

Once the bread was blessed and sprinkled with holy water, the woman was given a piece of it to eat. At this point the ordines from Paris, Sens, and Reims continue with a reading from the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John, "In the beginning was the Word,. . ." During this reading, the priest placed his stole upon the head of the woman and, at the end of the reading, he offered her the stole to kiss. At Châlons-sur-Marne, the Gospel of John was not read, whereas in Chartres and Cambrai, the Gospel was read before the woman approached the altar. Thus these rites omitted placing the stole on the new mother's head. Instead, immediately after she had been given the bread she was offered either the priest's stole or the *pax* to be kissed. After the woman had kissed one of these precious objects, the priest sprinkled her with blessed water. Then, along with the rest of the parish community, she left the church. In the manuals from Paris, Reims, and Châlons-sur-Marne, the rite of purification is followed by a rubric explaining what should be done in the case of women too ill to come to church.

The central event in this rite of churching was participation in a regular parish mass.[58] A woman's experience of the mass, however, would have been quite different from the routine. A variety of customs, practiced at different times and places, surrounded a woman's mass of purification. At Meaux and perhaps also at Troyes, she processed to the church in the company of her midwife and the other women who had attended the birth of her child.[59] In the diocese of Troyes, the women who accompanied the new mother brought offerings for the church. The mother carried a candle, which she left at the church for use on the altar, and also a gift for the priest.[60] In parts of Normandy, she may have been accorded a special seat for mass on the day of her purification.[61] She may have been allowed to make the offering of bread and wine during mass, as women did in the region south of Paris.[62] Evidence for many of these customs is anecdotal and it is not clear how widely or how long such customs endured. Even if none of these privileges or customs were followed in a woman's parish, mass on the day of her churching became special when she was brought forward for her individual rite of purification at the end of the service.

The final blessing or purification, as we have seen, had four essential elements: the reading from John, reception of *pain bénit*, kissing the stole or

pax, and the aspersion. These are also the elements included in the abbreviated rite performed in the home of a seriously ill woman, which suggests their centrality in the meaning and efficacy of the ritual. The use of blessed water in this rite would, presumably, have a very similar meaning and impact to that discussed above for the *Ad introducendam*. The other three elements are, however, equally powerful ritualized actions and it is worth considering them individually and in more detail.

According to Eamon Duffy, the first chapter of the Gospel of John was "one of the most numinous texts used in the late medieval Church."[63] Besides being read as the "last Gospel" in the regular liturgy of the mass, this passage was used to bless bread, ward off evil, as a charm against illness and plague, and as part of paraliturgical rites such as the annual Rogation Day prayers for the fertility of the fields.[64] By crossing themselves as they heard this passage being read, people believed they would be protected from mishap. It was also part of the baptismal and funeral liturgies, and was used in rites of exorcism.

The use of this Gospel in the purification ritual could embrace many of these meanings. A new mother would be in need of physical healing since the process of childbirth was difficult and complete recovery of a woman's health was by no means a certainty. She would also be in need of protection from evil spirits since some medieval people believed that childbirth made a woman especially vulnerable to possession.[65] A text associated with fertility was appropriate because after a woman was churched she was free to engage in intercourse with her husband. Similarly, a text capable of freeing a woman from the dangerous humors associated with menstrual and lochial blood that could cause the conception of deformed and leprous children would be fitting. The reading of this Gospel during the rite of purification would have bristled with meanings and associations for the woman being churched and her parish community. Moreover, reading the Gospel with the new mother standing near the altar in front of the entire community emphasized that, on this day, the potential of this powerful passage was intended especially for her.

After reading the Gospel, the priest blessed a loaf of bread and gave the new mother a piece of the *pain bénit* to eat. The practice of receiving *pain bénit* at the end of Sunday mass was a popular custom in late medieval France.[66] It developed as a substitute for the reception of communion, which, by the thirteenth century, was normally taken by the laity only once a year, usually at Easter. Making the special loaf that was used for this custom was a privilege shared among the households of the parish. The loaf was carried up in the offertory procession by a member of the laity, perhaps by the new mother herself on the day of her churching, and distributed to people as they left church at the end of mass. Though intended to be a sign

of community, this could be an occasion for the display of the parish pecking order, with the most prominent members receiving the first pieces of bread.[67] On the day of a woman's churching, she received the first piece of *pain bénit* and was, thus, accorded a privileged place within the community.

The importance of *pain bénit* to the community is also reflected in the case of William Trochon. In the last decade of the fifteenth century, William and his wife lived in the small town of Joigny, located on the River Yonne between Sens and Auxerre. On the day Madame Trochon was churched, she carried the loaf of bread intended for *pain bénit* and some wine in the offertory procession. It is also possible that she, or someone in her home, had made the bread. It should have been blessed at the end of mass, the first piece given to Madame Trochon, and the remaining loaf distributed to the parishioners as they left church. But apparently this did not happen, for William took the loaf of bread and the wine from the church and carried it back to his home. His actions caused a scandal in the community. He was brought before the bishop's court and fined fifteen sous.[68]

It is not clear exactly what motivated William to scandalize his neighbors and bring himself to the attention of the *officialité*. Perhaps he was simply being cheap and thought to take the bread and wine home to contribute to the churching feast that afternoon. Or perhaps he was already having problems with his neighbors and begrudged them the bread his wife had made. Such motivations would suggest a rather profane attitude, treating the bread in a way that desacralized it and reduced it to merely an ordinary object. On the other hand, William may have been moved to take the bread precisely because of its importance. Perhaps he hoped that it would be a source of blessing for his family or that, since this was a special day for himself and his wife, they deserved the entire loaf.

But *pain bénit* was a symbol of the community. The whole loaf brought forward at the offertory suggested the whole lay community and their contribution to the mass and, beyond that, to the welfare of the church. By taking the whole loaf and leaving none for his neighbors, William violated the sacred and social order of the parish. No matter what his social standing or his reasons for taking the bread, he had no right to the whole loaf. William thus set himself above or outside of the parish community and it is no wonder that his actions caused scandal and outrage. For us, William's action reveals that the bread used for *pain bénit* was a highly valued commodity with considerable significance to many people of the parish and the local hierarchy.

Once the new mother had eaten the piece of *pain bénit*, the priest offered her his stole or the *pax* to kiss.[69] The custom of kissing a person or an object to express reverence or devotion is ancient.[70] Within the early church as well as in the wider world of late antiquity, the kiss was also an

important symbol and means of peace and reconciliation used to signify a return to unity after a period of discord.[71] A kiss between the members of the Christian community was incorporated into Christian liturgy very early, as can be seen in several references in the Scriptures.[72] Already by the late second century, the ritual exchange known as the kiss of peace was a part of the Eucharistic celebration.[73] From the beginning, the kiss exchanged between members of the Christian community was a sign of unity and love as well as a means to peace and harmony. It was not only used during the liturgy of the mass, but also in a variety of ritual contexts including ordination, the consecration of an abbess, marriage, and the reconciliation of a sinner.[74] The kissing of sacred objects was also a widespread pagan custom and, being part of Roman culture, it was eventually adopted by the early Church as well. The altar and the Gospel book were considered symbols of Christ; thus, kissing them was seen as a way of showing reverence to the Lord.[75] These early customs remained a part of the liturgy into the medieval period, though not without change. The kiss of peace, in particular, gradually moved away from the community of worshippers and became a ritual reserved for the clergy. It was reintroduced as a rite for the laity in the thirteenth century through the use of the *pax*.

Kissing the *pax*, like the use of *pain bénit*, developed as a substitute for communion. The English invented the *pax* during the thirteenth century and, thanks to the Franciscans, its use soon spread throughout western Europe.[76] During the Sunday liturgy, after the consecration and before taking communion, the priest kissed the altar and then the *pax*. He then passed it on to the attending clergy or acolytes who, after kissing it themselves, passed it on to be kissed by the people.[77] The ritual action of kissing the *pax*, like its antecedent the kiss of peace, was meant to serve as a symbol of unity with all members of the community kissing the one *pax* and passing it along to their neighbor. Kissing the *pax* expressed membership in the community and was often accompanied by a prayer for peace.[78]

In two of the ordines for purification, a woman could kiss either the priest's stole or the *pax*, suggesting that the two actions had a comparable significance.[79] In contrast to the kissing of the *pax*, however, the meaning and history of kissing the stole is obscure. The stole was already a part of the priest's vestments in the seventh century but its origin and meaning are not well known.[80] By the ninth and tenth centuries, wearing the stole at all times was obligatory so that it was always worn when the priest administered one of the sacraments.[81] As a result, it was strongly connected with the priesthood and the sacramental powers of the Church. Kissing the stole, however, was not part of the liturgy and, as far as I have been able to discover, nothing has been written about the history or meaning of this custom.[82] However, kissing an object that was to be used during the liturgy

was not unusual. The priest kissed the Gospel book. He also kissed the altar at the beginning of mass and again before the kiss of peace and the passing of the *pax*.[83] Clearly, these ritual kisses were meant to display reverence and devotion. In this context, kissing the stole could express reverence for the priesthood and, more widely, for the Church. It might also be understood as an act of reconciliation, reestablishing the newly purified woman's connection with the Church and her parish. When a woman kissed the *pax* or the stole during her rite of purification, then, she performed a ritual action that was meaningful to her community. By doing so, she expressed reverence for the Church and devotion to its rites and customs.

The four essential ritual gestures, the reading of the Gospel of St. John, the reception of *pain bénit*, the kissing of the *pax*/stole, and the aspersion with blessed water, were all impregnated with meaning. Like the *Ad introducendam*, the rite *De purificationis mulierum post partum* focused on two central goals: purification of the new mother and her reintroduction into the community. Adolph Franz observed, quite correctly I believe, that French women could attend mass and receive *pain bénit* without any special rite of introduction.[84] Yet with or without the rite at the church door, the ritual blessing of a new mother at the end of mass accomplished these goals, both functionally and symbolically. The woman was allowed to join with the parish in hearing the mass, she was cleansed by the sprinkling with blessed water and further united with the community through the reception of *pain bénit* and the kissing of the *pax*/stole. While it spoke eloquently of purification and membership in the community, however, the impact of the ritual of purification went beyond these important and intentional consequences of the rite.

One of the characteristics of ritualization according to Catherine Bell is the ability of ritual to say and do more than the participants intend or realize.[85] The action of purification performed in the various rites for a woman after childbirth not only cleansed her of any lingering evil connected with childbirth but also confirmed her as polluted. The rite could not communicate cleansing without also implying pollution. The woman's identity as a polluted person must have been recognized by the priest, the community of observers, and the woman herself, even though the new mother was never explicitly referred to as polluted and the bishops described the rite as one that honored marriage. Without a shared worldview, a common vocabulary of meaning to which all members of society had access, the rite would not have been effective or understandable.[86] This suggests that the idea that a woman was polluted by childbirth was widely recognized. In spite of the episcopal legislation redefining churching, the idea that it addressed women's pollution was clearly expressed in clerical writing, especially confessors' manuals, and the ritual gestures of the rite

suggest that the belief was not peculiar to members of the Church but was shared by the illiterate and unlearned.

As Bell points out, however, common belief is not necessary for the function of a dominant value. All that is necessary is consent.[87] The fact that people can participate in a ritual without necessarily espousing the values beneath the ritual reveals the complexity of ritualization and makes analysis of ritual actions more difficult. The members of a modern family seated around a Thanksgiving Day dinner, for example, may not believe the mythology that surrounds the holiday nor accept the image it portrays of America as a grateful and peaceful people. But as long as they consent to being there and eating the meal, the ritual continues to express those values and ideas. In the same way, it would not be necessary for every member of the medieval parish to believe in the pollution of women in the same way or to the same degree, as long as they still consented to participation in the rite. Individual woman may or may not have considered themselves to be polluted by childbirth. But regardless of the belief of individual women, their acquiescence in the opinion of the clergy and their participation in the rite allowed the ritual to have an effect. By acting out the purification of women, the ritual of churching created the category of polluted women.

Less obviously, churching as a ritual of purification created pollution itself as a problem that endangered the Church and its purity. Rituals of purification create and maintain the problem of pollution, thus creating the situation to which they then respond.[88] In this case the problem was located specifically in the bodies of sexually active women and its solution was directed at them. Rituals that create the problem of pollution are essential for without pollution there is no purity. As Mary Douglas has argued, defilement does not exist in isolation but only within a system of order.[89]

The social order that explained and required the existence of pollution in the bodies of sexually active women was the medieval Church and, especially, its celibate clergy. The vow of celibacy that distinguished the clergy from the rank and file of Christianity not only set the clergy above such worldly activities as producing children and raising a family, but also moved them closer to God. This elevated position gave them both moral and real authority in medieval society. Without the pollution of sexually active lay men and women, the meaning of celibate purity and the consequent power of the clergy could be called into question. No doubt medieval clergymen did not see or intend that rituals of purification created pollution; rather they would have understood the rituals as solving the problem of pollution that simply existed as an unquestioned reality. But without rituals such as churching, which served to give sexual pollution a visible manifestation by working to resolve it, the concept would have lost its reality and much of its impact.

At the same time that churching empowered the clergy, however, it also empowered women by drawing attention to their ability to threaten and destroy priestly purity. The hermit who used his cloak to avoid touching his mother was not only creating a boundary, but also protecting himself from a perceived danger. The fear expressed in the *exemplum* was acted out in the liturgical use of the priest's stole to lead the new mother into church. Even though she had been purified, she remained a sexually active woman and, as such, a threat to priestly celibacy, which was not only a personal virtue but also the basis of clerical claims to moral authority. The woman's sexuality, the source of her pollution, made her powerful because she was dangerous, capable of destroying something very precious and important. By creating and confirming women's sexual pollution, churching also constantly created and reaffirmed the Achilles heel of clerical authority.

Because of the gendered and hierarchical structure of liturgical ritual, churching also reflected and served to reify certain aspects of the social order. As I argued earlier, leading a woman into church confirmed and strengthened the authority of the priest. In the absence of a rite at the church door, it was still the priest who welcomed the woman into church, gave her the *pain bénit*, offered her the *pax* or the stole he was wearing to be kissed, recited over her the precious words of the Gospel, and finally cleansed her with the sprinkling of blessed water. It was surely no accident that a woman was churched by the action of a priest, rather than her husband, for example, or by her own ritual bathing, as Jewish women did. The priest could assume the privileged position that enabled him to act in these ways by virtue of his ordination and his gender. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to disentangle gender and ecclesiastical hierarchy in this context. The priest's ability to serve as the conduit for God's grace came because of his ordination but this status was contingent on his maleness since women were then, as now, denied ordination because of their sex. Churching, thus, unambiguously confirmed the place of the clergy over the laity and in one sense asserted the superiority of men over women.

In another sense, though, it disturbed customary gender hierarchy; it blurred the boundaries that surrounded male privilege. New mothers were brought forth from the congregation at the end of mass and allowed to come near to the altar. The sanctuary, however, was a sacred, male preserve generally prohibited to the laity and especially to women. Ecclesiastical legislation forbade women from approaching the altar to participate in the mass or the divine office.[90] Her presence in the sanctuary on the day of her churching, therefore, temporarily placed a woman in a privileged position that neither the clergy nor the gendered structure of medieval society generally recognized as appropriate.

The power of this action to disturb gender hierarchy, however, was not unambiguous. There were other situations in which women were allowed near the altar but in ways that seemed to affirm their subordinate social position. In the marriage ritual the couple approached the altar in order to receive the nuptial blessing.[91] At the consecration of a virgin, the woman approached the bishop who was seated near the altar in order to receive her habit and ring and to make her vows.[92] Such rubrics probably intended that the women singled out in this way were made visible to the assembled community who were observers of and witnesses to the ritual. They can also be read as reaffirming a woman's place under male authority. The bride came with her husband and the nun knelt before the bishop to say her vows. Certainly the authors of these liturgical rites did not intend to suggest that women had a status above that of their husbands or male guardians, but rather the opposite.

But ritual actions are neither univocal nor easily controlled. They have the ability to express more than a single idea and often suggest far more than the celebrant or author intended. A woman standing alone in the sanctuary on the day of her churching was an image that could be interpreted in many ways. The woman may have viewed her approach to the altar not as a reassertion of her submissive role as wife, but rather as a claim to the honor of her motherhood. In her view, her experience as a mother, as a woman capable of this enormously powerful and mysterious act that brought her to the brink of death even as she brought forth new life, gave her a power and authority that was expressed in her right to approach the altar. It was the fact of her motherhood that brought her to the altar steps where she stood alone, without her husband. It was a privileged position that was not only granted to her by the clergy, but one she deserved and had earned by risking her life. It is not hard to imagine that new mothers approached the altar with a mixture of feelings, timidity, perhaps, but also joy and pride, asserting themselves in their uniquely feminine role as mothers. Standing alone before the altar, the new mother assumed a temporary though real place above her husband, above men in general.

We have no first-hand accounts of French women's thoughts about the experience of churching, but a series of synodal statutes issued between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries governing the use of *pain bénit* indicate that some women believed they were being accorded a special privilege. The earliest was in 1208. Odo of Sully, bishop of Paris from 1196 to 1208, ordered his priests to ensure that "when women come for purification after childbirth, [the priests] should give them only blessed bread and should in no way offer them the body of the Lord unless they should ask for it expressly and have first confessed."[93] Around 1346, the bishop of

Meaux issued a statute with the same wording.[94] It seems, however, that even though the priests gave women only ordinary blessed bread, women tended to view it in an extraordinary light. A statute issued from Chartres in 1368 warned women taking bread after their purification not to fall to their knees before it, nor strike their breasts and say "confiteor" as they received it, actions that suggest that the women identified the bread as the Body of Christ.[95] The bishops made further efforts to dissuade women from this view by ordering the priest not to hand bread to the women, but to ensure that they took it in their own hands either from the altar or, preferably, outside of the church as was the usual custom with *pain bénit*. The bishops clearly designed such directives to discourage the women from misunderstanding the meaning of the blessed bread. A similar statute issued in 1403 by Bishop Simon de Bucy of Soissons says plainly that these measures are necessary to keep "simple women" from committing idolatry by worshiping the blessed bread as the Body of Christ.[96]

In fact, women's understanding of the *pain bénit* they received when they approached the altar leaves no doubt that they understood this as a moment of special privilege. In spite of what the bishops wanted or what the priests intended, at least some women believed the bread they were given was sacred. They gave it Eucharistic reverence and significance; and the reception of the Eucharist was a rare privilege for the laity in the late Middle Ages. A woman's belief that she was being given the Eucharist on the day of her churching, that she was brought forth from the congregation, by herself, to receive it from the priest, suggests that she understood her own position in that liturgy to be one of special honor.

Rituals that are frequently repeated, as churching was, can be a particularly powerful opportunity for performativity: actions that work to create the identities or positions they name.[97] From this point of view, the ritual of purification was a performance of clerical superiority that successfully created and established the reality of clerical superiority. At the same time, it was a performance of women's ability to disrupt traditional gender hierarchies, creating women capable of invading male space and prerogative, if only temporarily. The rite *De purificationis* performed contradictory aspects of medieval social life, creating order and yet challenging it through the same ritualization. For some women, experiencing or even watching others go through the ritual of purification may have been empowering. For them, the ritual delivered a message of affirmation and reassured them of their value as women and mothers. For other members of the community it may have been extremely uncomfortable, perhaps reminding some women of their barrenness or raising the frightful specter of female power before the eyes of some men. Likewise, the rite could have been reassuring or a source of anxiety for the clergy. For some priests it was, no doubt, an

opportunity for pastoral care, for others a time to ensure proper order in the parish, for still others a dangerous exposure to contact with the opposite sex.

As ritualization and performance, churching did more than purify a new mother and welcome her back into the church. It constantly created and made real notions of purity and pollution surrounding human sexuality. Interestingly, the ritual could just as easily be used to protect sacred space from women's pollution as to protect marriage and the obligations of the conjugal debt. The rite strongly underlines women's pollution, however that is understood. It is even possible that the basic elements of the liturgy date back to the twelfth century or earlier. At the same time, the liturgy established basic social identities and hierarchies of the late Middle Ages along with their uncertainties and contradictions. As a significant and effective ritual, the rite of purification after childbirth was a complicated phenomenon able to communicate on a variety of levels and accomplish different things for different participants while engaging all of them in a single moment of symbolic activity. The rite for ill mothers, which was added to some liturgies, focuses on yet another meaning of this ritual: its association with childbirth.

CHAPTER 5

SI VERO MULIER GRAVI INFIRMITATE: CHURCHING AND CHILDBIRTH

The liturgical ritual at the parish church celebrated the recovery and return to regular routine of women whose experience of childbirth left them in relatively good health. In this sense, the parish ritual assumed a normal birth and marked the end of the process of childbirth that began when the mother went into labor. Indeed, one important way to understand churching is to locate it within the broader context of childbirth.[1] This chapter does that by considering the events and customs that surrounded childbearing in the Middle Ages. But childbearing could be deadly and even women who survived the process could suffer damage to their health. The ritual of churching for a woman too ill to attend the public event was an adaptation designed to address this reality by allowing purification to take place in the mother's home. This private ritual, like the one intended for celebration in the parish church, expressed multiple meanings, including the idea of healing.

The process of childbirth began with the first signs of labor. The mother's husband or a messenger was sent to notify the midwife and the mother's relatives and friends, who then gathered to assist in the delivery. For most French mothers, childbirth happened in the home although during the twelfth and thirteen centuries, large numbers of hospitals were founded, which offered poor women a place to bear their children. Those who took advantage of such hospitals or who gave birth alone were often suspected of trying to hide something, usually an illegitimate child. In most cases, however, a special room or space was set up in the home for the delivery of the child and the mother's lying-in. Often this was an exclusively female space, although this varied with local custom, class, and regional differences. In the widely scattered farmhouses of Norway, for example, a woman might be assisted by her husband and only one other woman,

perhaps a midwife.[2] In regions where women were not so isolated, however, it seems that the preferred custom was to exclude men from the birthing chamber and to rely on female assistance. The birthing room itself may have been darkened and the mother provided with comfortable bedding and warmed wine, though these customs, too, would vary according to class and region.[3]

Books providing practical guidelines on how to assist a woman in childbirth and also visual representations of women giving birth provide the little information we have about childbirth in the Middle Ages. For example, laboring women are usually portrayed seated in a birthing chair, supported on either side by attendants, with a midwife positioned in front to guide the birth and catch the child. Descriptions of difficult deliveries sometimes suggest placing the mother in a bed. Many women must have given birth on the floor of their homes strewn with clean straw to receive the infant. A thirteenth-century French text advised women to place the newborn on lukewarm straw to avoid startling the infant with any sudden change.[4] Birthing rooms are usually depicted as full of women busy with preparing warm water, gathering clean linens, warming or swaddling the newborn, and perhaps providing nourishment for the mother. Although these tasks are real enough, how closely the pictures describe an actual situation is hard to determine.

It was the norm for women of all social classes to have a midwife assist at the birth of their children.[5] Under normal circumstances, midwives cared for the mother and aided her during labor, helped to deliver the baby, and provided immediate postnatal care to both the newborn and mother. The nearly ubiquitous presence of midwives may explain why French bishops turned to them for assistance in certain situations. Katherine Taglia has studied the way French midwives were licensed and taught to administer Baptism in case of emergency, which also suggests how often the lives of newborns were threatened.[6] The *Liber sinthomatibus mulierum*, which circulated as part of the texts attributed to the Salernitan woman known as Trota, suggested a number of methods for assisting a woman whose labor was difficult or unproductive, including herbal remedies, powder of frankincense to make her sneeze, and walking. If the child presented abnormally, the midwife should "assist with a small and smooth hand moistened in a decoction of linseed and fenugreek, and [should] replace the child in its place and let her put it in its correct position."[7]

In spite of everything midwives and medical practitioners could do, some women died in childbed. Skeletal remains of medieval women who died with an unborn child still in the womb suggest some of the reasons for these deaths. Women suffering from bone deformities from rickets or other diseases might be unable to deliver a child. A perfectly healthy woman

could die in childbirth if the child was large and her pelvis too small.[8] In a study of the material culture surrounding childbirth in late medieval and early Renaissance Italy, Jacqueline Musacchio describes a number of tragic births. In 1388, for example, a physician wrote a note to a young woman's employer informing him of her particularly agonizing and unsuccessful labor.

> Since Tuesday evening your maid has been in labor and it is the most piteous thing one could ever see. Never has a woman suffered so much and there is no heart so hard that it would not sob to see her. She must be held down or she would kill herself, and there are six women to watch her in turns. This morning they fear that the creature in her had died in her body.[9]

Whereas the physician described this case as especially pitiful, women's suffering and hardship in giving birth was common. A study of maternal mortality in Renaissance Italy estimated that one out of every five women died as a result of childbirth.[10] Musacchio believes the situation to have been worse among the poor, although personal wealth and status did not protect women from dangers and difficulty in childbirth.[11] The Grand Duchess Giovanna de' Medici, wife of Francesco I of Florence, died in childbed in 1578. The combined efforts of her midwife and several male doctors proved futile; they finally decided to let her die in peace.[12] Although this evidence comes from Italian sources, the situation in northern France in the late Middle Ages was surely quite similar.

In cases of complicated delivery, medieval women looked for assistance not only from their midwife and, perhaps, a medical expert, but also from religion. Saint Margaret, who prayed for women in labor at the moment of her martyrdom, was a popular patron for women in childbirth. Her story, as well as that of Saint Elizabeth, who miraculously bore a child in her old age, and Saint Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary, were included in Jacobus Voragine's widely read *Golden Legend*.[13] The use of relics or charms to ensure a safe delivery or assist a woman in difficulty was also common. Some German *rituales* and priests' manuals included prayers or charms for a safe and painless delivery that used a combination of liturgical and magical references.[14] Many of these prayers have been preserved in liturgical books compiled by the clergy and intended for use by parish priests. The rubrics, written in Latin, indicate that the prayer was to be recited when a woman in childbirth was in serious danger and while touching the woman's belly. In other words, the liturgy imagines a scenario in which a cleric is present in the birthing room almost certainly along with a woman's birthing assistants and, perhaps, her physician or a male medical practitioner. The presence of men in the birthing chamber, especially during a dangerous

labor and delivery, contrasts with the usual image of medieval childbirth as an almost exclusively female situation. Clearly more study is needed to determine how widely such charms were used, especially outside of Germany. What is beyond question is the reality of danger and difficulty all medieval women faced in bearing their children.

The loss of a child during birth must have been fairly common and, although this surely caused grief for the mother and her family, it did not affect the woman's need for purification. Indeed, the celebration took on no special character if the child was a firstborn son, the fifth in a string of daughters, or a premature infant that died at birth. The Carolingian queen Richildis, you will recall, was purified after the birth of a son who died immediately. To my knowledge, the infant played no specific part in the French celebration in any way, either during the liturgical rite or later at the family feast.[15] Although this seems a curious omission to many modern minds, it underlines a medieval understanding of churching as a woman's rite.

Following the birth of a child, the new mother was usually allowed a period of rest and recuperation, the lying-in. This would have been even more important when the birth was difficult. During this period, when the new mother was more or less confined to her bed, she received visits from friends and relatives.[16] By the late Middle Ages, the custom of lying-in seems to have been well established in northern France.

Two anonymous satires on marriage from the late Middle Ages, *Les Quinze joyes de mariage* and "Les Ténèbres de mariage," provide literary descriptions of lying-in among women of the bourgeoisie.[17] The scene of a henpecked and suffering husband painted in *Les Quinze joyes* is set in the birthing room where the midwives and *commères* come to visit with the new mother. The anonymous author of this satire describes the women as eating enormous quantities of food and drinking barrels of wine. The poor husband is left exhausted trying to provide for them as they hover over his wife for weeks after the birth.[18] The passage from "Les Ténèbres de mariage" also refers to the custom of visiting during a lying-in and describes the women as cackling hens[19] and the poor husband who serves them as a lackey, chambermaid, and squire.[20]

Occasionally, nonliterary sources, such as household inventories and letters of remission, also offer evidence of the customs surrounding lying-in.[21] Though such descriptions are rare, they offer a nonsatirical account that adds balance to our limited understanding of this medieval practice.[22] The late medieval French word used to refer to a woman in childbed was *gesine*.[23] In an inventory of the items made for and given to the Countess of Flanders for the birth of a child in 1281, many items are said to be *pour la gesine ma dame*.[24] In a letter of remission, the sister of William and Peter Baril was said to be *en gesine denfant* after the birth of her child.[25] Women

from all levels of society are described as receiving visitors while they were *en gesine*. Some of the items listed for the Countess were specifically *pour le jour du regard*.[26] This suggests that there was, at least, one formal occasion on which visitors came to see the new mother and her infant. Peter Lequien, whose wife received a visitor when she was *gisant denfant*, was a poor laborer,[27] William Chastellain was a baker,[28] and the women in the literary satires were upper class or bourgeoisie. Undoubtedly, some women were too poor to afford the luxury of lying-in or were forced by circumstances to return immediately to the care of their families. Still, the custom does not seem to have been a privilege accorded only to the wealthy.

It also seems to have been customary to bring or send gifts to a woman during her lying-in. These could be for the new mother herself, for her child, or, in the case of the Countess, for the ladies who waited on her and the nurses who cared for the baby. For example, the Countess received rich coverlets for her bed, those of her ladies, and for the infant's crib, as well as candles, embroidered wall hangings, and richly decorated gowns. Musacchio's work on Renaissance Italy also describes visitors as bringing candles used to light religious images in the confinement room and gifts of clothing and blankets for the child. The mother herself wore special clothes, perhaps to impress her visitors or perhaps as a reward for her pain and effort.[29]

What visitors did while in the company of the new mother, assuming that she was recovering from a normal birth, differs considerably in the sources. The midwives and *commères* in the literary satires are depicted as particularly prone to talking and consuming great quantities of food and drink. Indeed, the modern French word *commére* means a gossip or busybody and the authors of the satires no doubt used it intentionally as a gendered stereotype with negative associations. Midwives and *commères* gathered around new mothers in order to eat and drink the husband into debt while gossiping and chattering endlessly. Such behavior is less apparent in nonliterary sources. The first items listed for the Countess of Flanders were silver serving dishes and utensils; though many of them, such as a covered pot for milk and a small, gold spoon for eating *papin* (a kind of gruel or, perhaps, cooked cereal), seem more suited to feeding the child than the Countess herself.[30] Musacchio also suggests that food and drink played an important role, but as gifts to the new mother. She indicates that visitors often brought poultry, thought to be a particularly nutritious food for the mother and so, perhaps, especially welcome if the mother was experiencing a slow recovery. Sweetmeats sold cheaply in apothecary shops were another popular item brought to Italian women of all social classes as a lying-in gift. In Prato, there was a charitable organization that provided the traditional sweetmeats to women whose husbands were too poor to buy

them. It was also customary to bring Italian mothers wine, sometimes in large quantities.[31]

The picture presented in letters of remission also suggests that food and drink were part of the hospitality offered to visitors, but usually in more moderate portions. Consider the description of a visit in the letter of remission for William Chastellain, a baker from Dreux.

> On the second of September just passed or thereabouts the said William and John le Guidre sent their wives to the town of Marcilley on the river Eure to the home of John Richaut, their close relative, because of his wife who was lying in childbed (*gisoit de gesine*) in order to visit her as is the custom of women to do. Afterwards, William and John borrowed two horses which they mounted and went to dine with their wives at the home of John Richart, their relative. And when they had dined together, they left to return to their homes.[32]

A meal was clearly shared, but there is no suggestion that the women ate continuously or that they drank excessively. When Peter and William Baril visited with their sister during her confinement, their fight on the way home that ended in William's death was explained as the work of the devil, rather than either brother's drunkenness.[33] Since drunkenness was considered an extenuating circumstance that mitigated the guilt of someone accused of a capital crime, the failure to use it as an explanation in this situation suggests that heavy drinking was not commonly associated with visiting new mothers during their confinement. When we turn to the celebration of the new mother's churching feast, we will find quite the opposite. Food and drink, then, were probably a customary part of visits during the lying-in, but gluttony and drunkenness were not.

The letter for William Chastellain stated that his wife visited Madam Richaut during her lying-in "as is the custom of women to do." In this case two wives, apparently related to one another, visited a woman related to them through marriage. The two literary satires also portray the visitors as exclusively female, whereas the husbands are there only to wait hand and foot on the company. In contrast, William and John le Guidre do not seem to have resisted or resented their wives' activity, but rather assisted them by arranging for the women's transportation and later joining their wives for dinner. Apparently, however, William and John did not make a special effort to visit the new mother themselves.

Nevertheless, other letters suggest that some men could also visit during a lying-in. We read, for example, that "Peter and the deceased William Baril, his brother, went in friendly accord to see one of their sisters who was lying in childbed."[34] In this case, the visit may have been appropriate

because the men were closely related to the new mother. It is not clear that men outside the immediate family were accustomed to visiting new mothers. Gillet le Monie was clearly not visiting a relative when he came to see the wife of Peter Lequien. However, Gillet and Peter were enemies and had earlier come to blows because Gillet was suspected of having committed adultery with Peter's wife. Thus, Gillet's interest in visiting Peter's wife, who was "lying in childbed in her bedroom," seems to have been connected to their personal relationship rather than to an accepted custom.[35]

Whereas *Les Quinze joyes* and "Les Ténèbres" describe the women who visit the new mother as "midwives and *commères*," the letters refer most often to relatives. Madam Richaut was visited by women closely related to her husband, the Baril brothers were visiting their sister, and Robuit de Laimoy, wife of John de Laimoy, went to see her sister who had recently given birth.[36] It seems likely that all of these were possibilities and that midwives, friends, and relatives all stopped in to see a new mother during her confinement. According to the satires, some mothers had a nearly steady stream of company but this, no doubt, was an exaggeration. Actual practice would have depended on many variables, such as social status and wealth but also the mother's health.

If the birth had been complicated or a woman was having trouble recovering, casual visits by friends may have given way to a more constant presence of close female relatives and midwives. In families that could afford it, a physician, whose presence would not be needed or expected under normal conditions, might also have visited an ailing mother. Guests may still have brought gifts of nutritious food and candles to place before images of a saint or the Virgin, but perhaps they kept their visit short. If the child had died, we can imagine visitors being solicitous but discreet, trying not to upset the mother or aggravate her condition. After a difficult delivery, then, the usual social customs surrounding lying-in would probably have been altered.

How long lying-in continued depended, again, on many variables. Regulations about when a woman could be churched were often vague and varied considerably from place to place.[37] We have already noted the letter of Pope Gregory I in which he stated that a woman could come to church in the very hour of giving birth and should not be punished for doing so, especially if she came to give thanks.[38] Gregory's lenient and compassionate point of view was repeated in some early penitentials, such as the *Martenianum*, and in two important works of the twelfth century, the *Decretum* of Ivo of Chartres and that of Gratian.[39] After the twelfth century, Gregory's opinion made its way into confessors' manuals, such as the thirteenth-century manual of Thomas of Chobham and that of John of Fribourg from the fourteenth century.[40]

However, in spite of the fact that Pope Gregory was a respected authority whose opinion was repeated in influential works, the belief that a woman should refrain from coming to church for some period of time after childbirth persisted. The synodal statutes issued at Meaux in 1493, for example, repeated Gregory's opinion but also went on to express a local custom. "According to the truth of the law of the Gospel," it reads,

> a woman who has borne a child is not held unclean on account of childbirth, nor are days of purification imposed on her, nor is she prohibited from entering the church. . . .Indeed, if a woman after giving birth to a child, out of humility, respect for the Church, and reverence for God, wants to abstain from entering Church and does so, this should certainly not be rebuked on account of the law but, rather, should be praised. Therefore,. . .we have in our diocese up to now observed the custom that women who gave birth to their children in legitimate marriage stayed away [from church, and] in order that this be brought to light, a certain number of days having passed, they process to the church, are brought inside by the parish priest with an aspersion of exorcised water, and there blessed bread is offered to them.[41]

In Meaux, then, pious matrons customarily waited "a certain number of days" after giving birth before going to their parish priest for purification. Exactly how many days were the custom in Meaux, however, is never made clear. A statute issued from Rouen was stricter. It firmly prohibited the purification of women before the "appointed time" (*statutum tempus*) had passed, even if money was being offered for an early churching.[42] Like the statute from Meaux, however, it does not mention a specific length of time, although the language suggests that there was a definite, legally established waiting period. Clerical discussions of the rite based upon the Mosaic Law often referred to the passage from Leviticus that prescribed purification forty days after the birth of a son and eighty days after a daughter (Lev. 12:1–6). Medieval medical opinion agreed that a mother's body took longer to recover from the birth of a daughter.[43] Given all these various prescriptions, coupled with local customs that might have varied from village to village, it is difficult to say exactly how long a woman typically waited before being churched.

The only statute with which I am familiar that specified a time between the birth and purification was from Cambrai in the fourteenth century. It stated clearly that a woman was not to be churched earlier than one month after the birth unless she was in danger of death.[44] Cultural beliefs embedded in traditional medical practices often play an important role in determining the length of postpartal restrictions, which can vary a great deal.[45] However, the practice of waiting a month, found in medieval as well as many other traditions, could also have developed around the physical

realities of childbirth. Within a month, lochial bleeding would normally have ceased and most women would have recovered sufficiently to allow the resumption of normal duties. At this stage of recovery then, which would have varied some from woman to woman, a mother might feel able and willing to resume her normal life.

The question of when to end a woman's lying-in and celebrate her purification depended on many issues: ecclesiastical dictates, local customs, a woman's own interests and concerns. In fact, evidence which is considered in chapter 6 suggests that women themselves controlled, or tried to control, the length of their confinement and the timing of their churching. If the birth and lying-in had gone smoothly, a woman would end her lying-in by attending the public service of churching. Even in this context, the rite acted as a purification, which promoted not only the mother's return to sexual activity, but also to full health. This was more evident if the delivery had been difficult and illness had lengthened the period of lying-in. If a mother had an especially slow recovery, she might postpone her churching or, in some places, take advantage of a private rite of purification performed for her in her home.

The rite of churching in three liturgical manuals, those from Paris, Reims, and Châlons-sur-Marne, included a rubric that allowed the rite to be performed at the home of a woman too ill to attend the public service. The elements of this private rite, which are examined more closely here, were quite similar to those for the public celebration of churching. Why the adapted rite was included only in these three manuals is unclear, although there are some historical connections among these dioceses. Reims and Châlons-sur-Marne are neighbors, both lying in the region of Champagne, and both are part of the ecclesiastical province of Reims. Reims is the older diocese and when Châlons-sur-Marne was first created, part of its territory came from Reims. It is not surprising that two churches with such close geographical and historical links would share customs and practices. Although the long tradition of anointing the king in Reims might have had some influence, the connection with Paris is more tenuous. In the twelfth century, the diocese of Paris was under the jurisdiction of the *officialité* of Reims, but the legal connection had little impact in Paris and, by the next century, even that technical association was lost. Although Paris is not a great distance from Reims, it was not part of the same ecclesiastical region but was rather within the ecclesiastical province of Sens. Yet, whereas the rite of churching is nearly identical in Paris and Sens, the manual for Paris included the churching rite for ill mothers and the manual for Sens did not. Why the private churching of ill mothers was included only in three manuals and whether it was performed outside the three dioceses studied here is impossible to say.

The rite of churching in the manuals at Paris, Reims, and Châlons-sur-Marne included the service as it was normally done in the parish but added this stipulation: "If, however, a woman is kept at home by serious illness before the time of purification and should request that she be purified, the priest should go to her. . ."[46] The liturgy for this private purification in these three manuals was nearly identical and quite simple. It began when the priest arrived at the home of the new mother. He first read the prologue of John's Gospel and then offered the woman a piece of *pain bénit* that had been blessed at a previous time. The priest then offered the new mother his stole to kiss, aspersed her with holy water, and departed. The manuals from Paris and Reims added the statement "if the woman wishes to receive the Body of Christ, no other purification is needed because the body of Christ cleanses [us from] all defects."[47]

The placement of this rite within the organization of these manuals is important for it suggests the mindset and interests of the medieval clerics who compiled them. In the manual from Reims, the rite of churching is immediately preceded by the ordo for bringing communion to the sick and immediately followed by the rite for the ejection of a leper. In the manual for Paris, the rite for ejecting lepers comes immediately before the ritual of churching. The manual for Châlons-sur-Marne included an ordo for visiting the sick and a rite for lepers but, as noted earlier, its placement in relation to the rite of churching is impossible to determine.[48]

Rites for visiting the sick, by the late Middle Ages, were primarily concerned with preparing the ill for death rather than with healing. Prayers for healing the sick had existed in early Christian practice and included the laying-on of hands and anointing with consecrated oil.[49] But as the political and social world of the late Roman empire gave way to the early Middle Ages, the Church's liturgical response to physical illness tended to move away from its earlier focus on physical health and toward spiritual purification and preparation of the infirm for death. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century ordines for visiting the sick, including those in the manuals for Paris, Reims, and Châlons-sur-Marne, included anointing with oil, purification by aspersion, and confession. Purification was also part of the rite of churching for an ill mother, but in the ordines for visiting the sick it clearly served as a preparation for death rather than as a source of healing.

Rites for lepers, like rites for the dying, made no reference to physical healing. In the manuals from Paris, Reims, and Châlons-sur-Marne, the ordo for the ejection of a leper has a penitential character and strongly suggests that the leper is preparing for death, even if that event is not imminent.[50] Lepers were aspersed with holy water, offered an opportunity for confession, anointed with oil, and allowed to hear mass, in some cases specifically the Mass for the Dead. In addition, the rite for lepers physically

moved them from life within the community to a leprosarium situated outside the village where they were expected to live out the rest of their days. Like churching, the rite also purified the leper with an aspersion of holy water; however, the clerical compilers of the manuals may have situated churching near the rite for lepers less because of a similarity in the liturgies than because of the belief that lochial bleeding, like menstrual bleeding, could cause leprosy.

The manual for Reims also includes a rite for bringing communion to the sick separate from the rite of anointing the sick.[51] In this liturgy, the priest first asked the infirm to recite the Confiteor or show some other sign of faith, then offered the ill person eucharistic bread and wine, read the prologue of John's Gospel, and finally aspersed the infirm with holy water. This liturgy differs in tone and detail from the ordines for anointing the sick. As in the purification of an ill mother, there is no overt concern with the sinfulness of the infirm and no liturgical actions that suggest the person is approaching death. The aspersion with holy water and the reading of John's Gospel, both of which are part of the churching for ill mothers, are common liturgical elements with multiple and varied meanings not necessarily connected with either illness or death. Historically, however, the reception of communion was associated with rites for the dying. In fact, the central act of preparation for death in the early church was the reception of the Eucharist as *viaticum*, that is, as food for the journey of the soul into the afterlife.[52] Liturgical manuals from the late Middle Ages often incorporated the reception of communion into the ordo for visiting the sick, although none of the manuals under discussion here includes this form.[53] Offering communion to the sick, or to an ill mother, might have implied that the person was nearing death. On the other hand, offering communion to the sick in rites that do not seem to prepare the ill person for death may indicate that the meaning of bringing communion to such persons had changed by the late Middle Ages. Offering communion to the ill may, instead, have been seen as bringing them spiritual, and perhaps physical, strength.

Comparing the liturgical elements of the rites for the dying, the sick, and the purification of ill mothers shows important differences but also similarities. Likewise, the association of lochial blood with leprosy suggests a connection between the two rites. The placement of churching near these rites in the manuals from Paris, Reims, and Châlons-sur-Marne might depend on these similarities and associations. Another important element that all of these rites have in common is that they mark a transition, a movement from one social space to another, although they ritualize movement in very different directions. Rites for the sick and dying eased the soul's transition from this world to the next; the ejection of lepers

ritualized their social and physical removal from the community of the healthy; churching marked a woman's return from the relative isolation of childbirth to full participation in the life of the village or parish. Marking a transition, of course, is a common feature of many liturgical rituals. Baptism, for example, removed the barrier of original sin and incorporated a child into the Christian community. Marriage altered the social status of the couple and marked their transition to adulthood. Unlike other liturgical rituals, however, prayers for the sick and dying, the ejection of lepers, and churching also have a common basis in the physical condition of the participants. They are, in fact, a liturgical response to that condition. Among these, however, churching is the only ritual designed to bring the participant back into the community of the living. This important difference suggests the possibility that churching sometimes served as a ritual of healing.[54]

The key elements of the liturgy for churching an ill mother, the Gospel reading, reception of *pain bénit*, and aspersion, are similar to those used in the parish ritual. Like the public rite, it was clearly a rite of purification. In rites for the dying, purification was meant to drive away demons who would otherwise impede the soul's progress to heaven. The priest purified lepers before leading them from their homes to the church for mass, perhaps using the aspersion as a shield protecting the public from contagion as the leper made her way to church. In the liturgy of churching, the purification of a new mother had multiple associations. Many clerical writers, as we have seen, understood this as a spiritual matter needed to cleanse the mother from the pollution of lust experienced during the conception of the child. The spiritual purification of a new mother could, however, be considered a source of physical healing.

This understanding rested, in part, upon the very loose and often allegorical association between sin and sickness in the minds of medieval clerics. The Church had a long literary tradition linking leprosy with sin. Scholastic theologians developed and expanded this theme so that, for example, Richard of Saint-Victor associated leprosy with impurity, fornication, concubinage, incest, adultery, avarice, usury, giving false witness, making a false oath, and more.[55] There was also a tendency among late medieval preachers to link specific diseases to specific vices. The Franciscan Bertrand de la Tour associated envy with epilepsy, avarice with dropsy, and gluttony with apoplexy.[56] Even so, the Church did not explain individual illness as the direct result of personal sin. When sin was directly related with illness, it was usually understood in communal, rather than individual, terms. The actions of the flagellants, for example, assumed that the plague was the result of sin in general but not the individual sins of specific persons.

At the same time, both clerical writers and physicians understood the line between spiritual health and physical health to be porous. The belief in miraculous cures relied upon the assumption that spiritual actions, such as the prayers of saints, could have a direct effect on physical illness. Both theological and scientific texts discussed spirit possession as a physical phenomenon located in specific parts of the body, which varied, depending upon whether the spirit was good or evil. In the case of demonic possession, exorcism was both a physical and spiritual cure.[57] The physician Arnau of Vilanova (ca. 1240–1311) believed that medicine could alter the appetites and emotions so that, in effect, it not only aided the body but also the soul.[58] There was also a direct theological connection between lust and the pains and difficulties of childbirth since both were the result of original sin. In a general sense, then, without imputing personal sin to the mother, spiritual purification of lust might lead to physical healing from the pains of childbirth.

Not all medieval clerics understood the purification of churching in spiritual terms. In their discussion of the purification of the Virgin Mary, some clerics connected churching with healing after childbirth. Their main interest was the ideal of virginity and, in particular, the perpetual virginity of Mary who remained a virgin before, during, and after the birth of her son. As the ideal virgin, Mary's integrity and lack of bodily corruption was lauded and defended in sermons and theological treatises.[59] These arguments made extensive use of metaphors such as describing Mary's womb as a gate that remained closed,[60] or Christ as the Word of God that was conceived in the heart and could depart from it without corruption,[61] or the birth of Christ "as a ray of sunlight [that] passes through a stained-glass window without breaking [it]."[62] Geoffrey of Vendôme presented a striking though confusing argument that Christ was born through something other than Mary's vagina. Using *vulva*, *uterus*, and *porta* interchangeably, he argued that Mary was left intact and whole after the birth of Christ because he was born through the "door of her womb."[63] It is hard to imagine exactly what part of the anatomy he had in mind but he apparently is suggesting that Mary's side or stomach was miraculously opened, leaving her sexually intact after the birth of her son.

None of these images were unique to the authors mentioned here and, in fact, the idea that Christ's birth had not destroyed Mary's virginal integrity had a long history by the time these texts were written. Marina Warner, who argues that the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity originated in the apocrypha, especially the *Book of James*, describes the origins and the history of such images.[64] Aquinas's idea of Christ as the Word that passed seamlessly into and out of Mary's body, Warner points out, was already apparent in a sixth-century poem by Venantius Fortunatus. The image of

Christ as a ray of light passing through stained glass was used in a Christmas poem, wrongly attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, and also in a thirteenth-century vernacular poem by Rutebeuf. The twelfth-century mystic and composer Hildegard of Bingen also wrote that Christ was born from Mary's side and imagined intercourse before the fall as painless and without bodily corruption, as gentle perspiration passing from husband to wife while they lie side by side.[65] In this, she followed the lead of Augustine, who argued that, before the fall, sex occurred without passion, pain, or the loss of bodily integrity.[66] Mary's miraculous experience of conception and childbirth would have been shared by every woman, he argued, had it not been for the sin of Adam and Eve. The repetition of these ideas, in sermons and popular songs throughout the Middle Ages, served not only to constantly reaffirm belief in Mary's virginity, but also to widen the distance between Mary and ordinary women.

Perpetual virginity was obviously impossible for ordinary mothers who were not privileged with such miraculous intervention in the conception and birth of their children. Clerics obviously knew this and indeed argued that women deserved the pain and torment of childbirth because they enjoyed the illicit delights of conception. The treatise of Paschasius Radbertus, written in the ninth century and still an important part of the theological corpus in the central Middle Ages, made this point quite powerfully. Because Mary did not bear her son according to the flesh but rather through the Holy Spirit, Christ was born "without pain and without groaning, without trouble and toil, without sadness and suffering, since all these things are most justly the retributions and punishments of condemned flesh in [its] original state."[67] And since Christ would not have allowed his mother to bear the groanings, pain, and sadness of Eve, Radbertus concluded, "there was one purgation, that of women, in which they were purged no less for the sins of their souls than for the defects of their bodies, and another purification of Mary, in which the custom of the law is observed not for any reason but on account of a mystery."[68] Thus, the rite of churching not only purged women of the sin of lust but also cleansed their bodies of the corruption suffered in childbirth. In other words, churching was also in some sense a rite of physical healing.

Some clerics explicitly described churching as a remedy or cure for corruption. Peter of Blois, who studied in Paris and Tours in the mid-twelfth century, wondered why Mary obeyed the law requiring purification and sought "remedies for female infirmities as if she had suffered in some womanly way in conception and childbirth."[69] Guerric of Igny, writing in the twelfth century, called it a remedy for women's weakness.[70] Guiard of Laon, a canon in Paris in the thirteenth century and chancellor of the university there in 1236 and 1237, praised Mary because she did not

decline the rite of purification intended for the corruptions of childbirth even though she herself was incorrupt.[71] Absalon, an abbot of Saint-Victor in the thirteenth century, argued that the rite of purification was made for women who were corrupted, not for Mary who was untouched and who gave birth without pain.[72] An anonymous Benedictine preacher developed this theme using a colorful metaphor. In following the customs of churching out of humility rather than necessity, he explained, Mary showed women the efficacy of the rite just as a doctor might drink his own medicine in order to encourage his patient to take it.[73]

The physical benefits of purification, however, were more commonly associated with cleansing the new mothers from the pollution of unclean humors, as we have already seen. Churching removed the dangers of leprosy or deformed children.[74] In this sense, churching was always a rite of healing insofar as it focused on the health of the husband and potential offspring who could be harmed by polluted blood. Women were believed to develop immunity to the poisons of menstrual blood so that it was only dangerous to them if it was retained.[75] Adapting the rite for women too ill to come to church and placing it among rituals for the sick, reflects these clerical understandings of churching as a rite of healing, but also reflects the tendency to think of women's sexual pollution in terms of its effect on men rather than women.

Medical opinion, however, may have been more likely to understand purification as a source of healing for the new mother. Churching was generally understood as a rite that cleared the way for the resumption of conjugal relations between the new mother and her husband. Ecclesiastical legislation governing the sexual lives of the married laity stipulated that couples were to refrain from intercourse until after a woman had been churched.[76] At the same time, the Church's teaching on the mutual duties of spouses to render the conjugal debt if it was requested put a heavy burden on women to seek purification after childbirth as soon as possible. Studies of women in modern Third World countries with strongly patriarchal cultures reveal that a major issue for women's health is their inability to control the times and conditions of sexual activity.[77] It is not hard to imagine a similar scenario for many women of the Middle Ages. And though some physical conditions would have made the resumption of sexual intercourse difficult or dangerous for the new mother who was having trouble recovering, this certainly was not always the case. Thus a desire for sexual relations on the part of the new mother or her partner may have prompted the request for the private rite.

Within the medieval medical tradition, however, the resumption of intercourse had implications for the mother's health. Both the ancient Greco-Roman and Arabic medical traditions believed that (hetero)sexual

activity was important for women's health. A healthy body maintained a balance of humors and elements; a lack of balance caused disease. Sexual activity for both men and women was understood as healthy because it prevented an overabundance of semen to accumulate and cause problems.[78] In addition, most medical authorities agreed that intercourse was good for women because it helped to maintain the heat and moisture needed for a healthy uterus. If the uterus became too dry or if an abundance of semen accumulated and became poisonous, the womb could move around inside a woman's body causing paralysis, suffocation, and other serious, even fatal, disorders.[79] It is not likely that a new mother would have been diagnosed with this condition, but intercourse was recommended by medical authorities as an essential element of women's health. A physician or health practitioner might suggest that a woman ask for the private rite of churching because, by removing the barriers to intercourse associated with polluted blood, he or she hoped to increase the new mother's chances for recovery.

For a woman who suffered from an extended or incomplete recovery after childbirth, the ritual of churching performed in her home had several layers of meaning. As it did for healthy mothers, it marked the official end of her lying-in, though in her case this did not mean a return to active life in the community. Depending upon the nature of her illness and the sexual interests of both her and her husband, it might also have meant a return to conjugal relations. Her private churching may also have acted as a rite of healing that emphasized this meaning of purification and used it especially for her return to health.

For most women, then, churching marked the last event in the long process of childbirth, a process that began with the onset of labor and ended with a new mother's purification. It was a dangerous process, even under the best of circumstances, and being able to celebrate a public and solemn churching must have engendered feelings of relief as well as accomplishment for many women. The healing elements of the ritual would probably have been welcome to women, even those for whom the birth of their child had been relatively easy. As a remedy, churching surely did not miraculously close the physical wound caused by childbirth. Still, as a prayer of healing it could offer women the aid of God's curative powers, something many women would have needed given the physical realities and consequences of childbearing in the Middle Ages. It is likely that the rite of churching for women too ill to come to church was meant, primarily, to ensure the resumption of marital relations. In this way, the purification of ill mothers supported the bishops' view of churching as a rite that honored marriage. But it is also clear that some clerics, and very probably some members of the laity, understood churching as a rite of healing from

the effects of childbirth. The purification of ill mothers thus reflects the richness of the ritual itself and the complex meanings that churching had for medieval people.

The process of childbirth was also an intensely female one. From labor through lying-in, to the day of purification, this was a time when women relied on one another for care, support, and even life itself. In spite of the attitudes and beliefs of bishops and members of the clergy, the ritual celebration that ended this process also belonged to women. Churching was, indeed, a women's rite.

CHAPTER 6

TOUTE BONNE FEMME: CHURCHING AS A WOMEN'S RITE

Images of the Purification of the Virgin in early printed books of hours, like fig. 6.1, often portrayed a crowd gathered to witness and participate in the rite.[1] In this example, a group of women and men accompany Mary for her rite of purification. The most prominent woman, well dressed and wearing a nicely decorated headdress, stands near Mary and holds a candle and a basket of doves. Behind the woman with the candle is a crowd of others too many to count. This black and white image was produced by a Parisian publisher and appeared in four printed books of hours that I am aware of, all from the late 1490s.[2] These relatively inexpensive books were intended for use by the bourgeoisie and the appearance of this image in them provides some insight into the way middle-class French women and men conceived of churching. The artist portrayed purification after childbirth as a rite of particular importance to women and through which they supported one another. Although both men and women gathered to witness Mary's churching, it was the women who stood closest to her and joined with her in the ritual. In other words, churching was a women's rite and late medieval society expected women to be invested in it.

It is quite likely that the women and men of the early Middle Ages, such as the Carolingian queen Richildis, already understood churching as a women's rite or at least as a ritual response to women's particular needs. As discussed in chapter 2, the redefinition of churching as a rite that honored marriage implied a new or nuanced understanding of the celebration both for the women granted the privilege of solemn churching and for those excluded from it by ecclesiastical legislation. Properly married mothers gained prestige through a ritual that honored their social status and fertility. Unwed mothers or women who bore children within relationships considered illicit by the church faced difficult decisions about whether or how to be churched. These decisions brought some women into conflict with

Fig. 6.1 Purification of the Virgin, Book of Hours, Paris, 1497. Courtesy of Rare Book and Special Collections Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

ecclesiastical authority, making churching a site of contestation rather than celebration. The bishops' redefinition of churching raised the stakes for all women who sought purification after childbirth and allowed the rite an increasingly important role in defining women's social identity and status.

A woman who was being formally churched had, for that day, a prominent position in the parish. She processed to church, probably accompanied by her friends and midwife; she was met at the door by the priest who sprinkled her with holy water; she was led into the church and presented with blessed bread. She was treated in a way that was very different than usual, with a "solemnity" that gave her a place of privilege. The ritual singled her out and recognized her as a pious matron whose conduct was approved and blessed by the Church. For medieval women, who seldom were singled out in such a direct and positive manner, this could well have been a heady experience. Visual representations of churching offer some insight into how the ritual was celebrated and what it meant to the proper matrons of medieval France.

As already noted in preceding chapters, medieval society connected the feast of Mary's Purification and the custom of churching. The Purification of the Blessed Virgin, or Candlemas, was the liturgical celebration of Mary's visit to the Temple for purification after the birth of her son. The association of this holiday with the churching of ordinary mothers was mentioned in many medieval sermons for the feast. In addition, the custom of women carrying candles on the day of their churching may well have been linked to the candlelight procession performed during the liturgy of Candlemas. Because of this linkage, images of Mary's purification in illuminated manuscripts offer some insight into the way medieval people conceived of the custom of churching.

The Feast of the Purification was one of the major celebrations of the liturgical year. Consequently, missals and sacramentaries often highlighted the liturgy with an illumination or a historiated letter. Books of hours, which become abundant in the fifteenth century, usually included an image of Mary's purification at the hour of None. Illuminated manuscripts produced between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries thus offer many images of this event as seen through the eyes of the medieval artist.

These images are complex, representing the purification of Mary, the presentation of Jesus at the Temple, and the celebration of Candlemas. Some aspects of the image were associated with one part of the feast and had little or no meaning in other contexts. For example, the illuminations almost always include the image of the infant Jesus being presented to the High Priest, even though the newborn had no role in the churching ritual celebrated in late medieval France. Other elements more clearly reflect the artists' perceptions of churching, though, here too, the meaning is complex. The appearance of candles can be read as a reference to the Candlemas processions as well as to Mary's churching. Actual descriptions of French women carrying candles at their churching, as we saw in chapter 1, are rare and early. The late medieval liturgy of churching examined earlier contains

no reference to candles but their use cannot be ruled out. Thus, the presence of candles in these images may well have reminded their viewers of both Candlemas and the rite of churching. The composition of the images also changes over time. The earliest images focus on the characters described in the biblical account of the Purification: the holy family, the priest-prophet Simeon, and Anna, the old woman at the Temple. Later images included crowds of people gathered to observe the event, many of them women.

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century images often portrayed only Mary, Jesus, the priest, and the old woman, Anna. In the three twelfth-century manuscripts that I examined, two included another woman besides Mary, probably Anna.[3] The third manuscript had no women at all, not even Mary![4] These images were actually focused on Jesus who was the central figure in the scene and always depicted as a miniature man blessing those around him rather than as an infant. In the thirteenth century, seven out of fifteen images included someone other than the Holy Family and the priest.[5] In the five images that clearly include a woman other than Mary or Anna, the woman carried either the basket of doves or a lighted candle. In four of these cases, this woman is the only figure present other than the Holy Family and the priest.[6] These thirteenth-century images are more clearly focused on Mary and her purification and suggest the idea that this was a feast during which women assisted other women. Mary's companion, if she has one, is another woman who joins in the ritual by carrying the offering.

In images from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the number of figures besides the Holy Family and the priest greatly increases. Only four of nineteen images from the fourteenth century, two from the same manuscript, failed to include at least one other figure in the scene.[7] In the fifteenth century, only nine images out of one hundred and three failed to include other figures.[8] Eighty-eight images (all but fifteen) have a figure carrying the basket of doves or a candle, and in seventy-six of those (all but twelve) this figure is a woman.[9] In fact, if the fifteenth-century images included any figure other than the Holy Family and the priest, it was most likely to be a woman; seventy-two percent or one hundred and thirty-nine out of one hundred and ninety-one figures watching the ritual are women.

Sometimes the groups were quite large. A manuscript from an early-fifteenth-century book of hours, for example, portrays Mary surrounded by a large gathering of women who crowd around the altar, nearly obscuring it from view.[10] Even larger crowds are found in early printed books of hours intended for use by the bourgeoisie.[11] A book printed in Reims in 1495, for example, depicts a crowd of at least nine people, including six women watching the rite and a seventh carrying the doves and a lighted

candle.[12] Like the image with which this chapter begins, the artist has given the impression of a crowd too large to fit into the church and spilling out of the doorway into the courtyard beyond. While printing certainly made it less expensive to produce complex images with multiple figures, it did not require that the Purification be represented in this way. It would also not be necessary to present the crowds as largely female if the image was intended to refer only to the celebration of Candlemas, an event in which all the members of the parish, both men and women, participated. Rather, the artists' tendency to depict Mary, now the central figure in the scene, as surrounded by a crowd of women reveals a perception of this purification as a women's event. The images from illuminated manuscripts suggest that, certainly by the fifteenth century and perhaps as early as the thirteenth, purification after childbirth was seen as a rite in which the Virgin Mother associated with and joined the community of ordinary women.

It seems likely that this artistic representation reflected a more widely held understanding of the rite. Some clerical descriptions of churching use words to paint a similar image of the rite as a significant association between the Blessed Virgin and ordinary women. Their understanding of this association relied, to some extent, upon the traditional argument that Mary's churching was an act of humility and obedience. John of Orléans, chancellor of Paris from 1271 to 1280, for example, praised the humility that moved Mary to seek purification but also credited her with courtesy or friendliness toward other women since, as he noted, "being one-of-a-kind is arrogance."[13] John goes on to explain that Mary chose not to stand alone and above other women as the only new mother not requiring purification, but rather out of humility and obedience chose to be one of them. While many sermons followed this pattern and stressed Mary's humility, clerics also understood this association with ordinary mothers as something Mary wanted and as a special blessing for women.

Some preachers stated simply that by following the law Mary participated in the custom of other women. Through her purification, said Bernard of Clairvaux, Mary stood "among the women, just as one of them."[14] Maurice of Sully, in the vernacular sermon for the Purification discussed earlier, said that Mary wanted to hold to the custom of other women.[15] John of Orléans made the point about Mary following women's customs in a sermon preached to a lay audience, in the vernacular, at the parish church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois in Paris.[16] The text of the sermon, preserved in a *recordatio* made by Raoul of Châteauroux, includes the reference to Mary's purification in both French and Latin. "She who was sanctified in the womb wanted to be purified according to the custom and law, *a la costume et a la loi*, of other women."[17] The appearance of French in the texts of Latin sermons is sometimes attributed to the scribe's inability to translate

a phrase into correct Latin; however, such an interpretation makes no sense in this case. We can explain the repetition of this phrase in both languages in two ways. It could be that John used both languages as he preached in order to make a point to his audience. It could also be that Raoul wrote the phrase in both languages as he listened to the sermon and made notes in an effort to capture in writing an emphasis that he heard in John's preaching.[18] In either case, the repetition in French and Latin serves to underline the idea that Mary's willingness to be purified connected her with the custom of other women. Sermons such as that of Bernard and John, both preached in the vernacular, indicate that this message was heard by the lay women and men of France.

A few preachers went further and stated that Mary's purification connected her to women in a special way. Thomas of Chobham, preaching in Paris around 1220 to a community of cloistered women, said, "The Blessed Virgin purified herself in order to obey the law which her son came not to destroy but to fulfill and, in so doing, she was following the custom for other women as in a company of friends [*societate familiaritatis*]."[19] Raoul of Houblonnière, a thirteenth-century master at the University of Paris, in a sermon preached to the beguines of that city, stressed that Mary's association with women was a privilege. "Mary," he wrote, "wanted to bear company with other women [*mulieribus societatem*] and, in this, she honored them greatly."[20] By making this point, the clergy seem to have accepted the idea that churching was a special occasion, an honor and a blessing as well as a cure for pollution and sin. Mary's churching privileged the ritual, giving it a positive aura in the eyes of the clergy that it might not otherwise have possessed. Indeed, as Odo of Châteauroux said to a group of nuns, "You know that the Purification is a feast of women; in fact, it should be for a woman and by women."[21] In these sermons preached to women, a point we will return to, Mary chose to be purified and so placed herself within a circle of women who are, therefore, blessed by her presence.

The language used in these passages is noteworthy. Thomas of Chobham used the word *familiaritas*, a term that implies long familiarity and closeness. Both Thomas and Raoul used the word *societas*, an uncommon term in the sermons I examined that expresses the notion of association most powerfully. The Latin term *societas* suggests a group of people united in a common effort or joined by a common bond and was used by early Christian writers to refer to the community of the Church. In the early Middle Ages, however, as Megan McLaughlin has noted, this word came to signify a clerical community and those associated with it. The *societas orationum* included all the members of a community, both living and dead, joined together in prayer.[22] The intentional use of these terms to describe Mary's association with ordinary mothers is striking. It suggests that the clergy

envisioned Mary forming a long and intimate connection with these women, creating a community of those who prayed together by sharing the custom of churching. This is a very powerful image, especially coming from clerics. Mary's membership in this exclusively female community, which the clergy could only admire from a distance, honored all women.

It is noteworthy that the preachers used this language when addressing groups of religious women. It is quite likely that the sermons, especially Raoul's addressed to beguines, were preached in French. We do not know what French words were translated into *societas* and *familiaritas* when the sermons were recorded, though they must have carried a similar sense. Perhaps the clerics used these terms because they were addressing women who lived in community and for whom the image of Mary living among them would be particularly powerful, though some members of the audience may have been lay women and men from the neighborhood near the convent or beguinage.[23] Recall, also, the emphasis in the sermon of John of Orléans on Mary joining women and following their customs, which was preached to women. It seems that some clerics used the image of churching as a rite that offered women a special and intimate connection to the Virgin Mother of God when they addressed an audience that included women, whether virgins or mothers. Thus, clerics painted the image of churching as a women's rite not only for their fellow clerics, but also for the laity.

Although the actions of women, such as those discussed earlier who understood their reception of *pain bénit* as a special privilege, suggest that they, too, believed they were being honored in the rite of churching, our sources do not provide the voices of French women that we would so like to hear. We do, however, have the words of the fifteenth-century English woman, Margery Kempe, who described to her biographer her experience of watching other women being purified.

> She had such holy thoughts and meditations many times when she saw women being purified of their children. She thought in her soul that she saw Our Lady being purified and had high contemplation in the beholding of the women who came to offer with the women being purified. Her mind was all drawn from earthly thoughts and earthly sights and set all together in ghostly sights which were so delectable and so devout that she might not in her time of fervor withstand from weeping.[24]

Margery was moved to ecstasy and tears when she imagined that the Virgin Mary joined the women being purified and their friends in procession. Margery's mystical tears were surely not a typical response, not only because her reaction was extreme but also because Margery, we know, was

unhappy with her duties as a wife. Nevertheless, her personal identification with the women being churched and her connection of the rite with the Virgin Mary may well have been an experience she shared with many other women.[25]

Images that depict a crowd of women surrounding Mary and assisting her in the rite not only reveal a medieval perception of churching as a women's rite, but also suggest a custom of marking the event by wearing rich clothing. A fifteenth-century monastic missal from Rouen, for example, contains a beautiful illumination for the Feast of the Purification in which a group of four women attend Mary.[26] The most visible woman in the crowd wears a large, white headdress fixed with a circular, gold pin inlaid with gems. Her elegant green gown is decorated with bands of black and gold fabric at the bosom. The young woman standing closest to Mary and carrying the basket of doves wears a long-sleeved, pink robe. With her free hand, she holds up the hem of her robe to reveal a rich brown tunic decorated with figures in black. The central figure in the scene is Mary who kneels before the altar wearing a deep blue robe. Painters of illuminated manuscripts almost invariably presented Mary in this fashion. The depiction of the women who attended the purification, however, was not so constrained by tradition. Portraying women in beautiful and richly decorated robes, therefore, reflects the imagination of the artists and the tastes of their audience. Bourgeois women undoubtedly aspired to imitate the rich and costly attire of the upper classes, but other evidence suggests that the artists' depiction of women wearing rich clothing reflected more than the need to flatter their patrons.

The only medieval image of the churching of an ordinary mother with which I am familiar presents the new mother in fine clothing. In the miniature of a churching found in the pontifical from Boulogne-sur-Mer and described in chapter 4, the woman being churched wears a rich red robe with full sleeves. The collar of the robe and the cuffs of the sleeves are trimmed with fur.[27] The central figure in this scene is the priest, whom the elegantly attired new mother is following into church. The only witness of the rite is another woman who, in contrast to the new mother, is dressed austerely in black. She stands to the side with her arms crisscrossed before her breast and, thus, underlines the sense of impurity communicated by the priest's graphic use of the stole to avoid touching the new mother. The artist apparently intended to focus attention on churching as a rite of purification, yet, the new mother is not wearing penitential garb. Rather, like the women surrounding Mary in the books of hours, she wears a fine, rich robe.

Literary works from the central and later Middle Ages present a similar image of churching as a social occasion that required women to wear their finest attire. In the old French poem described earlier, Richeut took pains

to dress for her churching in fine and rich attire.[28] By allowing her gown to be mired, however, she also made it clear that such concerns were ridiculous. Although the meaning of Richeut's story is not without ambiguity, the humor of it seems to suggest that churching was a socially important event for which most women wanted to look their best.

The French hagiography of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary composed by Rutebeuf, a Parisian, lay cleric writing in the thirteenth century, also described the way women dressed for the day of their churching. Rutebeuf praised Elizabeth, who was a princess by birth and a duchess by marriage, for wearing a poor dress to her churching in contrast to other women:

> When the townswomen of the domain,
> Clothed in their mantles,
> Would go to attend the service of Purification Day,
> Each one would dress as a countess
> And pay much attention to her attire.
> That is the way they liked to go to church.
> But as for her, she would do otherwise
> And go in poor clothing, with bare feet. . . .
> She would enter the church, holding her child
> And carrying a lighted candle.
> She would put her load down on the altar
> Along with a lamb, thus imitating
> Our Lady at the temple,
> Who was her model.[29]

The scene Rutebeuf was describing was not in France but in Elizabeth's home of Thuringia, where, apparently, it was the custom for a mother coming for purification to bring her newborn infant with her. In spite of such differences, the author was clearly attempting to depict Elizabeth as holy and pious in ways the other women were not. He may have been exaggerating in order to mark the difference between Elizabeth and "the townswomen of the domain" when he described their clothing as extremely rich and hers as simple and poor. Still, if the work was to be effective, it would need to resonate with its audience, and so it is likely that the custom of dressing up for a churching was not foreign to the French men and women for whom Rutebeuf was writing.

In the fourteenth century, the Knight of La Tour Landry included a version of this story in his book of advice to his daughters. In this account, Elizabeth is praised for not having an elaborate churching and for serving a dinner to the poor.[30] The story of Elizabeth is part of a series in which the Knight used holy women, such as Rachael and Leah, to exemplify the pious matron who "*doit touzjours rendre graces et mercier á Dieu.*" Elizabeth's story

suggests that women offer thanks to God when they humbly present themselves to their priest and celebrate their purification without ostentation. The kind of extravagance the Knight was responding to is suggested by an item in the inventory for the Countess of Flanders, a gown embroidered with pearls and a matching headpiece for her churching.[31] The evidence from Elizabeth, the Countess, and the family of La Tour Landry, all of aristocratic or noble status, offers a rare hint regarding the customs surrounding churching at this level of society and suggests that the social celebration of churching among the wealthy was quite elaborate.

The anonymous French satire *Les Quinze joyes de mariage* takes us back to the bourgeoisie. The author refers to the tradition of women dressing up for their churching but from the viewpoint of a beleaguered husband. The henpecked husband in the poem asks his wife how she plans to buy the gown she wants for her churching. The wife responds disingenuously, "By God, husband, I'm not asking for a gown, and I don't want one either. I have gowns enough. Besides, I don't give a hang about fashion."[32] Needless to say, the poor husband "runs himself ragged, looking day and night for the abovementioned gown and other items, which perhaps put him deeply in debt."[33] Though the account is no doubt exaggerated, French women reading this satire would have recognized the author's reference to their custom of dressing up for a churching. In spite of the author's misogynistic exploitation of this custom for his own purposes and effect, the image of churching he presents is that of a prominent social event in which women took particular pride.

These visual and literary images strongly suggest that medieval French society understood churching as a rite celebrated especially for and by women. Artists and authors such as Rutebeuf associated women with the rite of churching not only because it was a ritual intended to address the unique needs of mothers but also because of the way women celebrated the event. Though most of the evidence for women dressing elegantly for this event comes from the bourgeoisie, this was also likely to have been the custom among the upper classes. How the poor celebrated the purification of new mothers is, not surprisingly, more difficult to see. Whatever social status a woman held, if she had given birth to a legitimate child within a proper marriage, she could enjoy the privilege of a solemn churching and the honor that came with it.

Another important component of honoring a new mother on the day of her churching was the *feste des relevailles*, the feast that followed the liturgical service. Our knowledge of these feasts is limited.[34] I have found only sixteen letters of remission that include an account of a churching feast and most of these are from northwestern France. Eleven of the sixteen records that mention churching feasts are from Normandy. Regardless of their

geographic origin, every reference to the feasts assumes that they were common and well-known events. The letter of remission for Jourdain Garnier notes, for example, that on

> the Thursday after the feast of Saint Mahieu just passed, [Jourdain] went to the home of John Desquetot the Young in the parish of la Chapelle de Bernonville because John's wife, who was a cousin of Jourdain's wife, had to be churched that day. Well, there Jourdain and his wife dined and made good cheer together, as friends and neighbors usually do in this case.[35]

In this account, the custom of gathering with friends and family to dine after a woman's churching, although it is not specifically called a *feste des relevailles*, is described as customary.

It also seems to have been the custom for these feasts to be held on the same day that the new mother was churched and usually at her home. Guests may or may not have attended the earlier liturgical service and mass since people often came to the feasts from some distance, traveling from neighboring towns or villages. Men and women from all levels of society enjoyed churching feasts. In eleven letters of remission that indicate the trade or status of the family, three were artisans, three were gentlemen or members of the bourgeoisie, five were poor laborers or field workers.[36] The guests were the parents, cousins, aunts, uncles, and in-laws of the new mother and her husband, as well as their friends and neighbors. Although the Knight of La Tour Landry does not call it a *feste des relevailles*, he is probably alluding to the customs of feasting after a women's churching when he tells his daughters that Saint Elizabeth gave food to the poor at her churching. By describing Elizabeth's celebration as "simple," he suggests that, rather than following the custom of an elaborate dinner for her family and friends, the holy woman gave away food to those in need.

No matter the social status or family connection of the celebrants, the feast was a festive occasion that brought all of them together for a large dinner. Unfortunately, the records are practically silent about what was served at any of the feasts. Every feast included wine, often in large amounts. Bread was, no doubt, ubiquitous though it merited specific attention on only one occasion when someone tried to use a loaf of bread as a weapon.[37] A few records mention meats such as rabbit, goat, and pork. Meat was the most important food served at late medieval feasts, though the presence of this luxury food would have varied a great deal according to family status and economics.[38] Still, the consumption of meat rose among the lower classes all over Europe, including France, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and it is quite likely that churching feasts, whenever possible, served as much meat as the family could afford.[39] Given

the French love of pastry, it is hard to imagine that churching feasts did not include such treats, but the sources never mention them. You would imagine that such festivities included music or dancing, but again the letters do not mention such recreations. They do indicate, however, that people gossiped and swapped tales, for much of the violence started with arguments over comments or accusations made in the course of conversations. The violence included both men and women, although never the new mother herself, or an immediate member of her family. Overall, the letters paint a picture of men and women gathered together around a table, eating and drinking and enjoying themselves at a party. The feasts could last into the evening with guests finally heading for home as the sun was setting (*a l'heure le soleil couchant*) or even after dark.

Because letters of remission were focused on the crime for which the supplicant was seeking pardon, persons not directly involved in the incident were given passing notice at best. Thus, even though a new mother was the focus of special attention on the day of her churching, her role at the churching feasts is not explicit in the sources. Nevertheless, the letters make it clear that churching feasts were given *for* the new mother. We read, for example, that Nandin Voisin was going to "a churching feast for one of his daughters."[40] William Godart and his friends went to the "churching feast for the wife of Boisart Danis."[41] In spite of the fact that they were family events in which, as we shall see, the husband played an important role, letters of remission always identified churching feasts in this fashion; the new mother was the cause of the celebration. It was her feast.

It seems safe to conclude, therefore, that the new mother was the center of attention in some way. If it was the duty of a good wife to attend to her husband and assure his comfort, as the Ménagier de Paris told his young bride, such feasts might have been one of the rare occasions when this rule could be bent and a woman could receive attention rather than bestow it on others. Probably the guests made a point to congratulate her on her blessing at the church and her new child. Perhaps one of the many rounds of wine was a toast to her good health. Since hierarchy at table was of great importance in the choreography of medieval feasts, perhaps she was accorded a special place and given a choice bit of food. All of this would, of course, vary depending on the social status of the family as well as with individual personalities and circumstances but it seems plausible that some mark of distinction would be given to a new mother at a feast given in her honor. Individual women might respond to these attentions in different ways. However, the feasts and the attention they brought a new mother and her family were depicted as positive, celebratory events and most women probably enjoyed them. Churching feasts, along with the liturgical celebration of churching, were an unusual opportunity for ordinary women to enjoy a privileged position.

Using the terminology of Arnold van Gennep, we can see the entire day of a woman's churching as a rite of passage that moved her from the liminal status and separation she experienced during her lying-in, through the transitional phase of the liturgical rite, to her full reincorporation into family and community through the shared meal of the churching feast.[42] Her procession to the church with her female friends and midwives and, if there was a rite *Ad introducendam*, her purification at the church door served as a rite of separation that marked a formal end to her period of separation and moved her out of the isolated state of lying-in. Her participation at the mass and reception of blessed bread at the end of mass were the first part of her reincorporation, marking her membership in the spiritual community of the faithful. The feast that followed and the resumption of sexual intimacy with her husband at the end of the day marked her full reincorporation into family and the broad social community of friends and relatives. The rite of passage moved her from her liminal status as a nonsexual wife and a nonparticipating parishioner and reinserted her into her traditional social positions of proper matron and respectable member of the parish community, positions from which she had been temporarily removed by childbirth and lying-in.

As the cultural representations and customs surrounding churching suggest, the medieval rite was a very social event. The images of churching portray women attending the purification rites of other women and perhaps, as Margery Kempe did, finding in the churching of their neighbors an affirmation of their own status and worth. The procession to church and the feast afterward brought the new mother into the public eye. The prominence a woman received at her churching was, therefore, not only personal but communal as well. The new mother stood forward as a member of the community of wives and mothers. As a woman preparing to return to her husband's bed and take up again the responsibilities and duties of marriage, she represented all the proper wives of the community. As a woman who had successfully survived the awesome task set for her at her marriage, "Be fruitful and multiply," she was a symbol of all the properly married mothers of the parish. Thus, the advantage was not only hers. Her solemn churching identified her as an individual wife and a mother but at the same time gave these roles, and all the women who played them, importance and value in the community. All wives benefited from and shared in her privileged position. For the community of proper wives and matrons, then, solemn churching approved and sanctioned by ecclesiastical authority provided public recognition of their respectability as well as a moment of personal honor.

The legislation that made churching the exclusive right of properly married mothers, however, also had a subtler, though no less powerful

influence in the realm of ideas. The redefinition and regulation of churching strengthened the ability of the ritual to reify and enhance the social category of wife. If performance serves, as Judith Butler argues, to establish identity through reiteration, then the ritual of churching was the site of a particularly powerful opportunity for performativity.[43] By acting out the role of proper wife, a woman claimed that identity for herself. But as a community moment and a public celebration of that identity, the ritual also served to reaffirm and reenforce the rightness of "proper wife" as a social category in medieval society. Furthermore, by privileging the churching of properly married mothers, the rite helped to create and maintain as normative the idea that all mothers ought to be married.

Medieval society, including most if not all women, saw these ideas as part of the divine order. Being a wife and mother were the "natural" and so largely unquestioned roles that women played. Nevertheless, these ideas had, and continue to have, enormous consequences for the lives of women in Western society. Only in modern times have some women questioned the limitations such roles imply and sought ways to identify themselves outside of the family. It is, therefore, valuable for us to recognize and understand the various and multiple ways the definition of mother and the ideal of motherhood were constantly reaffirmed and reconstructed, including the medieval ritual of churching.

The same gesture, however, that privileged properly married mothers also ensured that churching would become an occasion for conflict. As parish priests came to understand themselves as the protectors of proper churching, women acting on the belief that churching was their rite sometimes created tension. The court case of Madam Grossin, recorded in the register from the *officialité* of Troyes for 1503–04, demonstrates such a conflict. Madam was from Torvilliers, a village within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the bishop of Troyes. She had asked to be churched some three weeks or more after the birth of her child, but John Sartoris, her parish priest, had refused to purify Madam Grossin or receive her at the church on the grounds that she had not waited the full month that was customary in her village. Madam Grossin, whose first name is never mentioned in the record, and her husband, Peter, complained to the local *officialité* that John had unfairly refused her a proper and timely churching. Consequently, the priest was called to appear before the bishop's court and found to be at fault. He was imprisoned and punished by the bishop and made to pay Peter the hefty fine of one hundred sous tournois.[44]

Madam Grossin asked to be churched in a regular parish service, as was her right, but chose not to wait a full month before celebrating her "getting up." Perhaps household duties were pressing, perhaps she had other children to attend to, perhaps she or her husband were anxious to resume conjugal

relations. The strong clerical prohibition against men having intercourse with their wives before a woman had been churched, an idea that was presented to the laity both in sermons and through the vehicle of confession, operated on the assumption that couples would want to resume sexual relations as soon as possible after the birth of a child. Perhaps abstaining three weeks seemed long enough. Of course, the Grossins and other couples may also have disregarded the prohibition against intercourse before purification, but the belief that contact with lochial blood caused leprosy added a risk factor some would have found hard to ignore. Whatever her reasoning, Madam Grossin felt she had a perfect right to request churching a little over three weeks after the birth even though the parish priest claimed the custom in the village was to wait a full month.

Other problems arose when the bishops turned to midwives in order to enforce their legislation on churching, as we see in court cases involving women who failed to cooperate. In 1457, for example, a midwife named Jeanne, the widow of Peter Varlet, also from Torvilliers, was fined by the bishop for having allowed one of her clients to be churched when Jeanne knew, or should have known, that the woman's husband was under a ban of aggravated excommunication.[45] She apparently was supposed to inform the authorities about her client's husband so that the new mother would be denied churching by her parish priest.

Another interesting case, also from Torvilliers, happened on 11 July 1503, when Claude Girost and his wife appeared before the ecclesiastical court at Troyes. About two weeks earlier, Madam Girost had come to church for her purification but was refused by the village chaplain, John Barrois. After arguing first over money and then over the timing of the rite, the priest finally asserted that he had turned Madam Girost away because her husband was a contumacious, or unrepentant, excommunicate. During the hearing, John Barrois also accused Madam Girost of coming to church in the company of a woman who was not the midwife present at the birth of Madam's child.[46]

The bishops' use of midwives to verify a mother's freedom from any of the restrictions surrounding churching may have served the purposes of ecclesiastical discipline but it also turned churching into a site of potential conflict, especially within the women's community. In particular, it placed the midwife in an awkward position. Whereas she was customarily among the women who accompanied new mothers for their churching, the bishops' directives singled her out from this group by granting her the power to testify for or against other women in the community. This could easily create considerable tension between the new mother and her midwife.

Some woman, such as Jeanne and Madam Girost or her midwife, clearly attempted to avoid problems and circumvent the bishop's rules. The

sources do not tell us exactly what happened to bring these women into court, but hidden beneath the words of the bishop's scribe are stories about them and their relationships with one another. The midwife Jeanne seems to have lied or been silent about her client's husband. Either way, she chose to avoid saying something she knew would create a problem for her neighbor. Unless Jeanne was incompetent, her choice suggests a supportive association between midwife and mother in which Jeanne was willing to disobey the bishop rather than prevent the mother's churching.

For similar reasons, the midwife who had attended Madam Girost may have avoided attending the service so that she would not have to testify against another woman in her village. On the other hand, perhaps Madam's midwife was not informed of the day and time of the churching because she knew about the contumacious husband and would have felt compelled to testify to that effect. Was Madam Girost trying to protect her midwife from a difficult situation? Or, alternatively, perhaps the midwife stayed away because of some animosity between herself and Madam Girost; perhaps she wanted to cause trouble. In any case, the midwife's responsibilities forced her and other women to make decisions that could often have negative consequences. If the women were friends or good neighbors, a midwife was faced with acting dishonestly or causing trouble for someone she cared about. If the women were already on bad terms, an angry midwife could turn her neighbor's churching into a battleground and means of humiliation rather than a cause for celebration. Thus, regulations designed to give the bishop more control over churching also worked to create or aggravate social tensions surrounding the rite and, sometimes, to pit women against one another.

Issues over the control of churching were particularly difficult for mothers who had conceived and given birth outside legitimate marriage. The legislation regulating the rite was meant to control and perhaps discourage the churching of the improperly married mother. The special license that was required before such a woman could be churched forced her to come forward and be identified as a fornicator, adulteress, or concubine, or to admit her involvement in an incestuous relationship. It is not clear whether, if she obeyed the law and sought the special license, she would be churched alongside the legitimate mothers at a solemn service. If she was churched in a private rite, she was denied the social prestige of the solemn service despite her submission to the law. By accepting the discipline required by ecclesiastical statute and admitting her crime, however, she was allowed to resume her place among the laity as a member of the church in good standing. So while the discipline of the Church moved her to the margins of respectable society, the same discipline and, perhaps also, the ritual of churching, moved her from a marginal status as fornicator or adulteress to

a place within the community as a repentant woman. The identity she claimed and created for herself through these actions was, thus, complicated and, perhaps, conflicted. We can only speculate on the emotional and personal significance of such a transition, but it surely had an impact on the woman herself and on the gathered community of observers.

The importance of this moment in women's lives should not be discounted. Churching came at a critical juncture in a woman's life when she was poised to reenter her normal spheres of activity. It ritualized a woman's movement through liminality, the state of being neither fully outside nor fully inside the community, and back into the social life in her village or parish.[47] Denying her free access to this ritual of transition would have made her full reintegration into the community more difficult, perhaps forcing her to remain in an ambiguous and marginal position.[48] How she experienced this would, of course, depend on the woman, her sense of herself and the value she placed on her position in the community. Moreover, without purification to remove the dangers and pollutions of childbirth, it is not clear that an unchurched mother would have felt free to engage in intercourse. Given the fact that such pollution was believed to be physically dangerous, as described earlier, it is easy to imagine that not being purified posed real problems for such women.[49] Whether she or her sexual partner(s) perceived this as an insurmountable problem we cannot know. We do know, however, that when some women faced this situation, they tried to find ways around the regulations in order to have access to purification.

The obstacles they confronted in these efforts varied. The statute issued in 1493 to regulate churching at Meaux described women who, denied solemn churching "on account of [their] crimes," nevertheless continued to seek entrance to church. This legislation ordered the priests "to deny entrance into church to no woman after and on account of childbirth unless another canonical impediment stands in the way."[50] In fifteenth-century Meaux, then, it may have been possible for an unwed mother to be purified by hearing mass although she could not enjoy the privilege of a solemn and public service. Nonetheless, even though the bishop allowed unwed mothers this option, it is clear that some parish priests were turning away these same women. An unwed mother, even though episcopal legislation allowed her entrance into church, still faced resistance from the local clergy. In addition, excommunicated women or those whose husbands were aggravated excommunicates would be denied access to all Church sacraments, including churching. So, simply returning to church to hear mass was not a viable alternative for all unwed or improperly married mothers, even at Meaux.

In other dioceses, women were apparently denied access to purification entirely, unless they submitted to Church discipline. The thirteenth-century

statute regulating churching in Angers described women who "are secretly or clandestinely coming into church after the priests have begun solemn mass and so by this improvisation having themselves purified."[51] Here the priests were instructed to identify these women and turn them away. Nearly 200 years later, unwed mothers in Normandy faced a similar situation and some attempted the same solution. In 1478, Thomasine Pierres came before the *officialité* of Montvillier where she confessed that she had borne an illegitimate child and had not been purified. Nevertheless, "she dared to come into church and hear part of the mass being celebrated."[52] It appears that Thomasine, like the women in Angers, was seeking a way to meet her own desire for purification while avoiding any interaction with clerical authority.

Another solution used by some unwed mothers was to travel to a neighboring parish to be purified. In 1425/26, a single mother named Jeanne was purified by the priest Robert Freboure without the proper letter of permission. Robert was apparently known as someone willing to bend the rules, since he had also churched several other women whose names he did not know and without the proper licenses.[53] The record suggests that, since he did not know their names, these were not women from Robert's parish. But it seems that he allowed them to be churched at his parish, perhaps alongside his own parishioners. Thus, even though Jeanne might not have enjoyed her churching as fully as those who celebrated it in their own community surrounded by their friends and family, she nevertheless went through the ritual in a public service.

In other cases, women who sought churching at a neighboring parish were allowed purification but without any of the privileges associated with the rite. This was the case for Gilbetra la Cousatur whose illegal churching was recorded at the *officialité* of Montvillier. Sometime in the spring of 1486, Gilbetra, who was single, gave birth to a child. Her surname suggests she might have earned her living as a seamstress, but the father of her child, a priest named Richard Roussel, defended his actions by claiming that Gilbetra was a prostitute. "Gilbetra," Richard argued at his own hearing before the bishop, "belongs to everyone in the community." In either case, Gilbetra was an unwed mother. A little over three weeks after giving birth, she traveled to the town of Harfleur. There she and another single woman were purified by a priest who was apparently willing to ignore their unmarried status and the fact that they were not members of his parish. Like the women at Meaux, Gilbetra was allowed to hear mass but was denied the solemnity of the rite; she was not offered the gift of *pain bénit* that was customary for a woman on the day of her churching.[54] Because Gilbetra, like Jeanne, was an unwed mother and, for whatever reason, unwilling to comply with episcopal requirements for a special license, she sought

churching in a parish other than her own. She, thus, received the purification she wanted without having to conform to regulations that she found onerous or impossible.

The practice of seeking the rite of purification at another parish was, apparently, not very unusual. The records for the *officialités* describe a number of women who secured their churching by going to an unscrupulous priest in another parish.[55] Gilbetra was one of two mothers being churched that day in Harfleur. Robert Freboure, who churched Jeanne, spent about a month in prison on bread and water and also paid a fine because, among other things, he had purified a number of women whose names he did not know, apparently charging some of them an extra fee for the service.[56] The official record does not reveal the motivations of these largely anonymous women, though they probably believed in the rite's ability to purify and heal. From their perspective, however, and in spite of the fact that they often paid an extra fee, this must have offered a workable solution to their dilemma. Compelled by the circumstances of their lives to disregard the dictates of the Church, they ignored the law and appropriated the ritual as their own, thereby claiming the right to benefit from its numinous potential.

From the bishop's perspective, however, the problem with this practice was that it undermined official Church policy that had long made churching a special prerogative of the parish. Such policies were meant to protect parish revenues and also ensure ecclesiastical supervision over the moral lives of the laity. The bishops responded by issuing legislation reiterating the official policy and disciplining those who offended it. We have already seen that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century bishops in Noyon, Soissons, and Bayeux prohibited women from seeking churching from anyone other than their parish priest. Those who did so could be subject to excommunication. Synodal statute also reinforced the prohibition against churching by chaplains unless the local bishop had given them a license to do so.[57] By limiting churching to the parishes or to properly licensed chapels, the bishop not only established and protected valuable sources of revenue for the parishes of his diocese but also ensured that licensed priests, along with the regular parish clergy, could monitor who was being churched and impose ecclesiastical discipline on improperly married and unwed mothers.

One purpose of such legislation, therefore, was to prevent women such as Jeanne and Gilbetra from slipping through the cracks and avoiding the demands of Church discipline. The living conditions of many simple priests may have contributed to the ability of these women to take matters into their own hands. Poverty was a problem for some parish priests and some of these poor men, as well as others motivated by greed, were apparently quite willing to perform illegal rites as a means of securing extra income. It is even possible that these men rationalized their actions by seeing all

women as polluted and in need of purification, rather than seeing the rite as one that honored marriage. But as long as there were priests to perform such rituals, unwed mothers could choose to ignore the rules and seek churching in the place of their choice rather than in their local parish.

Seeking churching from a priest outside of their own parish was not, however, the only solution. Some unmarried or improperly married mothers were churched in a regular parish service by illegally acquiring or altering the necessary documents.[58] Willemina Henry, for example, was an unmarried woman who became pregnant by a married man. She was properly churched, however, by obtaining a letter stating that the father of her child was a single man and, furthermore, an Englishman, that is, a foreigner whose absence would be understandable and who could not be called upon to make amends for his alleged crime.[59] The letter was clearly falsified to ensure Willemina's churching and hide the fact of her partner's adultery. It is not clear how Willemina obtained her letter, but some priests were willing to produce false letters, probably for a fee. Thomas Laurens, for example, a priest and chaplain at Huegueville, churched a woman with a "letter of simple fornication" when apparently he knew that the father of her child was a married man.[60] By gaining the services of a priest like Thomas, Willemina manipulated the system, using illegal means to get what she wanted without telling the whole truth.

It is important to consider that Willemina's churching served the interests of her child's father as well as those of Willemina herself. It is possible that the father wanted to continue his affair with Willemina and so wanted her purified in order to renew sexual relations. We could, then, read this case as an example of a man's efforts and concerns rather than those of the woman involved. Yet, privacy was surely an issue. The falsified letter attempted to hide the identity of the father and still allow Willemina to be churched. The father's interests in privacy would have been better served, however, had Willemina sought churching in a way that did not require a letter. Although not denying the father's role and interest in this situation, Willemina's motivations may well have differed from his. The falsified letter allowed her to have a service at her own parish where she was a recognized member of the community and where she could be surrounded by women she knew. Perhaps this was a compromise between Willemina and her lover shaped by a complicated set of desires and circumstances that we cannot know.

Conniving in some way to acquire churching in a parish ritual, however, was not always a viable solution. Some women avoided parishes altogether and acquired purification at some other institution, such as a hospital or convent. Both Jeanne Milies and Willometa Songues, for example, were churched at the hospital in Nonancourt,[61] and the daughter of Peter

la Mort was purified at a convent of Carmelite brothers.[62] Other improperly married mothers found it better to be churched outside of any official setting. In 1450, for example, the unnamed concubine of deacon Adam Syreau gave birth to her child and was subsequently churched in the bishop's house at Pontifare where she and Adam lived.[63] Apparently, they hoped to avoid the scandal of a public event as well as the requirement to apply for a special license. Since her story was preserved through records of the *officialité*, we know that the situation eventually came to the attention of the ecclesiastical court and received the publicity she and Adam had tried to avoid. It is very likely, however, that other women, confronted with a similar set of circumstances, had themselves churched in private rites or through their own machinations without attracting the notice of the authorities. The efforts of these unwed and improperly married mothers underline the deep, personal meaning of churching in the lives of medieval French women and their sexual partners. Their interest in purification was clearly not the social prestige and honor accorded to properly married mothers, but rather something more intimate rooted in spiritual desire or concerns about health and purity.

Judging the motivations or reactions of the women in these stories is, of course, quite tricky. The records of ecclesiastical courts or *officialités* were kept by court clerks and cases were often handled by a *promoteur*, a court-appointed clerk trained in canon law. The voices we hear most clearly in the records, then, are those of the accused, usually a male, and sometimes those of the *promoteur* when his arguments or opinions were noted. All of this, of course, is filtered through the mind and vocabulary of the clerk. Behind these predominantly male voices are the lives and sentiments of often anonymous women.

The absence of women's direct testimony in the majority of these court cases makes their side of the story more difficult to discern and raises the question of women's agency. As in the case of Willemina, who may have compromised with her lover in arranging her churching, it is often not possible to clearly distinguish between a woman's choices and those of her partner. At other times, as in the story of a serving girl named Marie des Champs, the man's interest in churching clearly controls the event. Marie became pregnant by her employer, an armorer who, on at least one occasion, beat her severely.[64] After the birth, Marie was churched in her employer's home, a private arrangement probably intended to avoid scandal for the child's father. Marie's interest in being churched is very difficult to gauge. Her tragic story suggests strongly that she had very little control over her own circumstances. It is hard to imagine that she pushed her abusive employer to arrange for her churching or, even less likely, that she herself made the arrangements for a service in his home. Marie may very

well have wanted to be churched but it is possible that she received the rite only because her employer arranged it, perhaps motivated by his fear of her polluted condition and his desire that she be sexually available to him again. Cases such as those of Marie and Willemina remind us that behind every unwed mother was at least one man, perhaps more in the case of prostitutes, whose interests were also served by procuring an illegal churching.

In all the cases discussed so far, the women or men involved shared a common desire to seek purification after childbirth. One record of a mother who bore her child outside proper marriage, however, suggests that some women faced with the regulations denying them access to solemn purification chose, instead, not to be churched at all. In November of 1461, an episcopal court in the *officialité* of Rouen heard a case involving a single woman named Katherine. She had become pregnant by a priest, William Loutrel, and had borne a child but had not been purified after the birth. The record reveals that part of William's fine went to pay for Katherine's belated purification.[65] Katherine's desires in this case are not clear. She may have been too poor to secure the rite through any of the various illegal channels and, thus, grateful when it finally became possible for her to be churched. Alternatively, she may have felt that seeking churching in any way would bring her illicit lifestyle as a priest's concubine into the open. Since by the late fifteenth century both church regulation and public opinion condemned clerical concubinage, she may have feared such publicity would force her to separate from William. Faced with such a possibility, perhaps she felt it was better to live without churching than to live without the father of her child. On the other hand, it may be that Katherine was perfectly willing to live without purification and that she only went through the rite when she was pressured to do so by Church authorities.

Katherine's story raises the possibility of women who did not feel the need to be churched or who only received the rite under pressure from others. She reminds us that not all women viewed the ritual in the same light or valued it in the same ways. Some women whose sexual relationships placed them outside the community of proper wives apparently felt the risks and effort required to secure the rite were not worth it and so chose to remain unchurched. Their choice implies that they did not feel compelled to receive the rite since churching was not an unavoidable obligation. At the same time, their possible disinterest in being churched underlines the importance of the rite in the lives of the women who struggled against social and legal obstacles in order to receive it. The freedom of some women to ignore the rite of purification suggests that those who sought churching were also acting freely, out of desire and belief rather than compulsion. If, on the other hand, women like Katherine and perhaps

even some proper wives were churched because of pressure from others, their stories remind us that a belief in the value of or need for churching was shared by husbands, lovers, and other members of society. Although churching may not have been a ritual that all women wanted, it was a rite with very wide appeal to women and men in medieval society.

The efforts of unwed mothers to acquire purification suggests that they, too, understood churching as a women's rite, though in different terms than those of proper matrons. The women who saw in their books of hours images of Mary surrounded by bourgeois women and who heard preachers, such as John of Orléans, speak of churching as a women's privilege could claim churching as an honor they deserved. On the other hand, Gilbetra and other marginal mothers knew that they could make no such claim and that they could not control churching in the ways a proper matron could. Through their illegal actions, however, they exercised an indirect control over the rite and claimed it as their own. They rejected the definition of churching created by the bishops and depicted in books of hours used by proper matrons and bourgeois wives. For them churching was not a celebration of the honor of marriage and the birth of a legitimate child, but rather a means of spiritual support or healing available to all mothers, no matter their social status or the circumstances surrounding the birth of their children. At the same time, the efforts of women such as Gilbetra to secure purification underline the continuing belief in women's polluted condition and suggest that such ideas were common beyond clerical circles.

By acting in ways that redefined the ritual, these women also made churching a site for the contestation of power. It is true that they could not argue with a priest asserting their right to be churched according to their own needs. Neither could they make any claims about their position or status that would stand up in a bishop's court. Their struggle for control of their own churching was not acted out directly in a public forum but rather by their decisions to ignore, disobey, and subvert episcopal regulations. By ensuring that they received a rite of purification after childbirth, they exercised a kind of subversive power inherent in their marginal status. The power struggle over churching, however, went beyond the clash of interests created by women who understood it as their rite and the efforts of the clergy to control it. Questions of power and control become central to the story of churching as we turn to men and their use of this women's rite.

CHAPTER 7

LE JOUR DE LA FESTE: CHURCHING, HONOR, AND SOCIAL ORDER

As the regulations surrounding churching multiplied, the rite became increasingly precious. If women were excluded because of irregular sexual practices or recalcitrant husbands, those accorded the rite could claim a certain moral propriety. While the impact of this on medieval women was significant, the consequences of this change went much farther. The new regulations granted parish priests the power to admit or deny access to a rite that women and their families now understood as a mark of honor. Some clerics saw this as an opportunity to enhance their power and enlarge their incomes. As French families in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries gradually accepted the Church's definition of marriage and proper lay sexuality, they also came to embrace the bishops' definition of churching. By the fifteenth century, they were using the rite to celebrate their marriages and to proclaim the births of their legitimate children. As churching became a privilege of the properly married matron, its celebration became an elaborate event consciously manipulated to enhance her family's status and create social hierarchy. Consequently, it took on considerable importance for husbands, especially those with social ambitions or reputations to protect. Finally, the public nature of the rite and its frequent celebration within the context of the parish mass extended its influence beyond the limits of individual families. By the end of the Middle Ages, the celebration of churching reinforced the established social order of family and parish and reassured the entire community of continued fertility and a promise of tomorrow.

We have already considered the importance of churching as a source of parish income, but the rite also had a more personal meaning for the parish priest. Within the boundaries of the parish community, the priest played a special role as head of the parish family and spiritual father of his

parishioners. The image of priests as fathers to the laity was part of a long tradition built on the image of the clergy as married to the Church.[1] But it served as more than an image. A priest who engaged in intercourse with one of his spiritual daughters could be charged with spiritual incest and face a more severe penalty than if he had committed a similar transgression with a woman who was not a member of his parish. The role also carried with it certain responsibilities. As protector of the physical and spiritual well-being of his parish, he was charged with the upkeep of church property and goods as well as with the pastoral care of the parishioners. Like a father, he knew all the members of his parish by face and name. When the parish gathered for the Eucharistic feast, he ensured that strangers did not intrude on the family meal.[2] When members of the family erred, he meted out punishment or, if the error was grave, handed them over to a higher authority for their own good and that of the entire family.

As can be seen in the statute from Meaux or the one issued by Bishop Gellent for the Church of Angers, the priest's role in the ritual and regulation of churching reflected the same pattern. He was supposed to know the women he churched, offer those who were properly married the privilege of a solemn celebration, provide discipline to those who had erred but who sought forgiveness, and turn away those who resisted the call to repentance. The regulation of churching thus offered the priest another opportunity to function as the father and protector of his parish family. It afforded him a position of authority and power over the ritual that, without the regulation, he might not have had. He derived considerable power from his role as policeman of the social boundaries made visible and real through the ritual. If there were no regulations controlling who could be churched, there would be no need for a policeman.

Finally, the regulation of churching signaled and reinforced a primary division of the parish community, and the medieval world in general, into the clergy and the laity. It provided another opportunity for the parish priest and his bishop to assume a position of authority over the lay folk under their jurisdiction. Because the ritual focused on the sexuality of the women involved, and the regulations patrolled the proper exercise of that sexuality, churching highlighted the difference between the celibate clergy and a copulating laity. The twelfth-century reforms had worked very hard to make this distinction clear. Maintaining it was extremely important for it was an essential component of the clerical claim to spiritual and moral authority. We have already seen the language and logic of the educated clergy, men such as Vincent Ferrer, who used women's need for purification as a contrast to priestly purity. Among simple parish priests, whose duties included providing women with purification after childbirth, churching was a more practical and personal concern.

The case of Madam Grossin, the village matron from Torvilliers who was denied purification on the grounds that she had not waited a full month after giving birth, reveals the way churching could become a contest over pastoral authority and control. As we have seen, Madam Grossin had asked to be churched some three weeks or more after the birth of her child but been refused by her parish priest, John Sartoris. After the court hearing of the case, which John lost, tempers flared. John apparently accused Madam Grossin of being an excommunicate and, when the accusation was denied, defended the truth of his assertion and complained that his authority was being attacked. "I would know," he cried, "if I am master or varlet."[3]

By the time of this hearing, the custom of churching was well established among the families of northern France as a privilege of properly married women. Both ecclesiastical legislation and social custom acknowledged and continually reaffirmed this understanding of the rite. A properly married mother, such as Madam Grossin, and her husband would undoubtedly have been acting out of this understanding of churching when they sought to control its celebration. Given the variety of opinions and lack of clear direction on when a woman should be churched, the conflict may have been the result of misunderstanding. Nevertheless, the pastor's refusal was a serious affront to the Grossin's status in the parish, so serious that Monsieur Grossin took the priest to court.

The court case of the Grossins also indicates that churching served as an opportunity for the display and contestation of power. The battle between the Grossins and John Sartoris was about control. The couple wanted to exercise control over Madam's churching and perhaps over their parish priest. John Sartoris wanted to demonstrate his ability to control the laity, his parish, and the celebration of an important event. Moreover, the Grossin's complaint was considered important enough to be taken up by the bishop's court where it was given a full and formal hearing. Each of these parties had something different at stake in assuring that churching was controlled in a particular manner. Madam Grossin may have been concerned with her rights as a proper matron, her husband with honor and social status, John with his parochial authority, and the bishop with ecclesiastical discipline. Yet, for each of them, churching was the ground upon which this struggle over power was played out.

Churching became such a battleground because, by the fifteenth century, it was clearly something worth fighting over. As a valuable commodity, however, churching was also open to abuse. We have already seen that unwed mothers manipulated the rules surrounding churching in order to procure the rite for themselves. It is possible that John Sartoris manipulated the local customs surrounding churching in order to exert undue pressure

or control over his parishioners, or at least over the Grossins. Other priests, especially the unscrupulous or the poor, recognized churching as a financial opportunity, not only in terms of fees for the purification of unwed mothers but also as a way to extort money out of proper matrons and their families.

We considered the story of Madam Girost earlier as an example of episcopal efforts to use midwives for the maintenance of church discipline.[4] The case is worth examining more closely now. Sometime in June of 1503, Madam Girost of Torvilliers had come to church for her purification but was refused by the village chaplain, John Barrois. She claimed that when she came to church John demanded that she give him five sous before he would perform the ritual. John denied this and asserted, rather, that he had refused her churching because she had failed to comply with a whole string of regulations and customs. She had not waited the full month before coming for purification, the midwife who had come to church with her was not the one who had actually attended the birth, and, finally, her husband was a contumacious, or unrepentant, excommunicate.[5]

Notice that Madam Girost lived in the same village of Torvilliers where Madam Grossin had also been denied churching by the local priest. Though the priest in each instance was different, the repetition of cases from Torvilliers around 1503 suggests a local problem. Perhaps there was a history of antagonism between the priests and their parishioners. It is also worth noting that in both cases the court ruled in favor of the parishioners and against the local priests. The priests at Torvilliers, at least in these two cases, used churching in an abusive manner as a means of control rather than pastoral care, perhaps as a way to play out village animosities, and, finally, as a means of illegal gain. Certainly, not all parish priests operated in this fashion but at least one of the circumstances in this case, John Barrois's demand for money, was also a problem beyond the confines of Torvilliers.

Although John denied demanding money from Madam Girost, episcopal legislation protecting women from the designs of greedy or impoverished priests suggests that her accusation may have been based on actual experience. Sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century, the bishop of Cambrai issued a statute prohibiting priests from demanding money for burial, purification after childbirth, or other church sacraments.[6] A statute from Angers in 1269 accused priests who demanded money for marriage, burial of the dead, or purification after childbirth of simony, the serious sin of selling church offices or services. Those found guilty of this crime could be suspended from office, lose their benefices, be permanently exiled from the diocese, or suffer other punishments according to canon law.[7] Sometime between 1280 and 1285, the bishop of Noyon was faced with a similar problem and addressed it by establishing a set fee for the rite.[8]

Finally, in 1290, the bishop of Liège, John of Flanders, issued the following statute: "No priest may refuse to bury a body on account of a fee for interment nor should he postpone purification after childbirth for any evil excuse. And no priest should demand or ask for anything for burial or for performing any of the church sacraments. But if something has been given to them afterwards, priests may accept it."[9] These bishops recognized as appropriate the custom of women offering the priest a gift or some money after their churching. What was unacceptable was the practice of requiring that women pay a certain amount in order to be churched and refusing them purification if they did not pay. Episcopal efforts to curtail the abuse were clearly not successful since more than 200 years later, when Madam Girost was having her children, she faced the same problem. The abuse rested, at least in part, on the assumption that respectable parish matrons would rather pay for the rite than forego its celebration.

The final accusation John Barrois threw at Madam Girost was that her husband was under a ban of aggravated excommunication. Some bishops, as we have already seen, used midwives to ensure compliance with regulations prohibiting the purification of women with excommunicated husbands or husbands who practiced usury. Like the priests who demanded money before admitting a woman for purification, the bishops also used churching to extort something they valued out of the laity. Bishops not only used churching to enforce canon law on marriage and lay sexuality, but also as the tidbit that tempted the laity into the Church's web of discipline. Thus, medieval churchmen, from local priests to archbishops, used churching in legal and illegal ways to exercise control and express their authority.

Though episcopal legislation and court records always couched the regulation of churching in terms of pastoral care, individual men must have experienced conflicts, such as those with the Grossins or the Girosts, as a matter of personal honor. Though the need to maintain male honor was no less important for clerics than for the husbands they faced in court, the day of a woman's churching had particularly powerful implications for the honor of families and the men who governed them.

The *feste des relevailles* was given for the new mother to honor and celebrate her return to the community but these common feasts were not exclusively women's affairs. Churching feasts were complex occasions that honored the new mother while at the same time they celebrated her husband and her family. Although both men and women participated in the feast, its meaning was different for the new mother and her husband. Indeed, the *feste* was essentially a social affair and, therefore, an opportunity for the display of family status and the public honor of the new mother's husband.

The *feste des relevailles*, as already noted, was a common practice in northern France and involved the gathering of friends, neighbors, and relatives at the home of the new mother to enjoy a day of eating and drinking. The feast of a certain Madam Desquetot was typical in many ways. On a Thursday afternoon in the fall of 1381 in the Norman town of Bernonville, Madam Desquetot and her husband celebrated the day of her churching by welcoming into their home a large group of friends, neighbors, and relatives to celebrate Madam's *feste des relevailles*. If she followed the usual customs, Madam had left her home that morning to attend mass for the first time since the birth of her child about a month before. Presumably, she had received all the usual marks of honor that came to her as a proper matron: the company of good wives as she processed to the parish church, the priest's blessing, the first piece of blessed bread. Now, the family and friends of the Desquetots gathered to celebrate. Among those invited to the feast was Monsieur Desquetot's older brother who brought with him a close friend named John le Conte. Also present was Jourdain Garnier, a close neighbor of the family married to the first cousin of Madam Desquetot, as well as "a large number of good people" described as the neighbors and relatives of Jourdain and Monsieur Desquetot. The guests ate a fine dinner and drank lots of wine, "made good cheer," and lingered around the table long after the meal, gossiping and swapping stories.[10]

Although the churching feast was a very public and social event, it was first of all a family affair. Evidence for this comes from the relatively rare mention of gift-giving at the churching feast. One of the few cases of a guest bringing a gift involved Nandin Voisin who intended to bring a pig and some kid goats to the churching feast for one of his daughters.[11] In another case, the knight Guichart de Chartieres was asked if he would help with the celebration by taking from the king's warren six or eight rabbits to add to the feast. Out of love and family affection for his brother-in-law, Guichart agreed.[12] Such gifts of food may not have been unusual even though references to them are scarce. In the cases of Nandin and Guichart, however, it is quite possible that the gifts of goat and rabbit were being given because of family connections rather than a more general custom of presenting gifts to the new mother. These were not, after all, personal gifts for Nandin's daughter or Guichart's sister-in-law but rather contributions to the family feast. No matter how much such gifts might have been appreciated by the new mother, they emphasize the way men helped to ensure the success of this family event.

In many ways, then, the *feste des relevailles* was an event in which both men and women actively participated and shared the same social space. In a hierarchical society such as that of medieval France, this often meant that

women were relegated to a secondary position. As a dutiful wife who respected the authority of her spouse and as the passive recipient of her husband's sexual activity, the ideal medieval woman was subordinate to her husband. How this generalization translated into the personal celebration of churching feasts is impossible to say, but the new mother's experience of the celebration would surely have been different from that of her husband. It is, of course, possible that many women took pride in their married status, were every bit as anxious to return to marital relations as their husbands, and found sharing center stage to be a pleasant experience. Nevertheless it seems that, in spite of the fact that churching feasts were given in honor of the new mother, they were primarily public celebrations at which the proper matron would assume her traditional, subordinate position within the family.

As a social occasion, the feast seems to have been a male-centered event to which men came, bringing with them other men. One of the guests at Madam Desquetot's *feste des relevailles*, John le Conte, was a friend and companion of her brother-in-law, John Desquetot. At other churching feasts, guests seem to have been invited because they were friends of the husband, not the new mother. John Grosparmi, for example, "was eating and making good cheer with several of his friends who were gathered for the feast and churching of his wife."[13] An account of an English churching feast in an ecclesiastical court record from 1366 makes it even clearer that some guests were there because of the husband. The record states, "Ellen [the wife of Gervase de Rouclif] was churched in respect of her delivery on St. Martin's day, . . .and William de Huntyngton was present at the feast held by Gervase after the churching because Gervase and William were great friends."[14]

The significance of the churching feast for the husband, then, was complex. In the most personal way, it was a celebration of his masculinity since, at least according to Church law, the couple were free to resume marital intimacies after the wife's purification. The actions of the sexual partners of some unwed mothers, such as the employer of Marie des Champs, suggests that medieval men accepted the idea that women's polluted condition after childbirth posed a serious health threat. Consequently, I think it very likely that churching feasts had some of the bawdy enthusiasm of the fabliaux. Underlying the evening's festivities was the assumption that, after the guests were gone, the husband would enjoy the pleasure of his wife's body.

On a more public level, however, a man expected the churching feast of his wife to bring him honor and prestige in the eyes of his neighbors, many of whom he had invited to the feast himself.[15] Consider the story of Madam and Perrin Malet. The letter of remission for Perrin written in 1384 includes a detailed account of the efforts he made to arrange the

churching celebration of his wife and the feelings that arose when his efforts were frustrated. In order to "purify and church his wife on time and according to the custom followed in the Church," Perrin contacted the priest to arrange the churching, notified his wife's friends and neighbors who would "give her honor and company as [was] the custom among honest women," and "put out great expense to prepare a feast for his friends." In the midst of these preparations, Perrin was told that "he had wasted his time." The priest suspected Perrin was under a ban of excommunication and, therefore, his wife would not be churched. In spite of all Perrin's efforts to prove his innocence, the priest did not church Madam Malet. As a result of the cancelled celebration, "Perrin suffered greatly, for the shame and embarrassment that he received in place of honor, as well as for the expense he had gone to; and he returned [to his home] sorely disgraced."[16]

The story of the Malets' aborted churching celebration suggests several ways of understanding the importance of this event. First, we see that the importance of the celebration for Madam Malet was also a concern for Perrin. He wanted her to have a proper churching, done in a timely manner, according to church custom, and with the support and company of other decent women. He was well aware that this was meant to be an event that honored her and established her right to a place among the honest matrons of the parish. The feast that followed would have been given in her honor: a moment when her family and friends recognized her in a special way. The entire day of her churching should have put Madam Malet in the spotlight and surrounded her with favor and respect. And Perrin seems to have been keenly interested in assuring that his wife be honored in this way. His wife's good name, after all, reflected well on him.

We also see that the celebration had direct implications for Perrin. His role in the preparation of the feast was public and authoritative. It served as an expression of his status in the community. It was his task to organize the celebration, to talk to the priest, to invite the guests, to spend money and time in an effort to throw a good party. His ability to perform this role reaffirmed his right to traditional male prerogatives and responsibilities; it confirmed his position as the head of a well-ordered household. Perrin should have been able to revel in his accomplishments at the feast, to rejoice in the company of his friends, to drink to the fertility of his wife and the hope of more children to come. His failure to organize a successful churching for his wife, to produce a celebration that demonstrated her place in respectable society as well as that of the family, resulted in a sense of disgrace and embarrassment. He had anticipated an event that would bring him, and his wife, honor. Instead, he was shamed in the eyes of his community.

Perrin was apparently operating, at least in part, out of an understanding of feasting as an important form of social display. Among the aristocracy,

feasts were highly orchestrated events used to demonstrate social prestige and power. The guests were seated according to rank with the most prestigious allowed a table in the same room with the host and hostess while lesser guests were seated at tables in other rooms. At a fourteenth-century feast for the dauphin, for example, the prince and his family shared the high table in the hall. In the next room were seated the barons and great knights. Simple knights were given a table in the next room and squires, clergy, and clerks were the furthest removed from the hall. In addition, each table was served a different quantity of food, the lesser guests receiving smaller portions than the greater.[17] Guests might be served different food depending on their rank. At a dinner given by the bishop of Lisieux in 1425 in honor of the archbishop and chapter of Rouen, the canons were served bittern, a small variety of heron-like birds, whereas the bishop and his three confreres were served real heron. Moreover, only the archbishop received his food covered, that is, warm.[18] Since medieval kitchens were generally some distance from the rooms in which food was eaten, servings easily cooled before they arrived at the table. Hot food thus became a mark of prestige, which, in this case, was given only to the most distinguished guest.

Though extravagant feasts were limited to royal and aristocratic circles, there is no doubt that people of the non-noble classes sought to imitate the aristocratic style of feasting. The bourgeoisie of Lille celebrated an annual Fête de l'Epinette, which included a procession, a banquet, and a knightly tournament. A fifteenth-century description of the feast included a menu of twelve different meats and wine, with guests seated in different rooms according to their rank.[19] Recipes in the Ménagier de Paris' guidebook were nearly identical to those in courtly cookbooks even though he was a townsman.[20] Although the Ménagier was apparently connected with court circles, the fact that he included such recipes in the guidebook for his wife suggests that he considered them appropriate for use in his own home. Perhaps such practices were the stimulus for late medieval and early modern sumptuary laws, which forbade private families from eating a meal of more than three courses and even attempted to control the kinds and quantity of food served.[21] It seems that by the late Middle Ages, wealthy townspeople were imitating noble patterns of feasting and eating in an effort to enhance their own social prestige.

Churching provided an occasion for this kind of display. A royal churching feast could be as much a display of power in its own way as any given by the king for his great barons. In 1465, during the churching feast of Queen Elizabeth Woodville after the birth of her daughter, the future Queen Elizabeth of York, all the attendants and guests, including countesses and ladies of rank, were made to kneel and watch while Elizabeth

slowly worked her way through the meal that lasted three hours.[22] The Queen's obvious disregard for the discomfort of her "guests" was a deafening proclamation of her power. Sumptuary laws passed a century later in England reveal that it was not only the royal family who saw churching feasts as an opportunity for lavish display. The laws limited feasts to no more than twelve guests and to only "one mess of meat for the midwife and gossips so that the poor could be relieved and superfluous charge avoided."[23]

The ability to offer such a feast was, in fact, an indication of power. The grander the event, the more varieties of meat offered, the more numerous the guests, the greater the prestige and honor accorded the host or hostess. Providing the enormous quantities of meat and drink required for a truly enormous feast would take weeks or months of planning and very deep pockets. Only the wealthiest could afford such a display and the celebrations of lesser folk were surely far less sumptuous. The social implications, however, remained relatively the same. It was no less important for a bourgeois family of Paris or a peasant family in Normandy to assert their status within the boundaries of their particular universe by giving appropriately large feasts when the opportunity arose.

The case of Perrin Malet, then, is not unique since families on every level of the social spectrum engaged in churching feasts and all of them are described as events in which a number of family, friends, and neighbors gathered to eat, drink, and "make good cheer." Like Perrin, the men of these families presumably went to some effort, putting in time and expense to make the feast a memorable and honorable event. The abundance of the meal would have been influenced by the quality of the last harvest, by the vagaries of war and plague, and by the time of year the feast was held. Certainly, the exact character of the menu would have varied from class to class and those with greater resources may have been able to compensate for the dearth of hard times better than others. But within the limitations created by such realities, the families of medieval northern France strove to make churching feasts an occasion for sharing their wealth and, so, putting it on display.

Thus, Perrin Malet's humiliation when his plans for the churching feast failed was quite understandable. He intended the feast to be a public display of his status that would add to his worth in the eyes of the community. Instead, "he received shame and embarrassment in place of honor" when his efforts came to naught. Proper churching and its celebration was a matter of family honor, which, in the ethics of late medieval Europe, was something to be protected with force if necessary.[24] It is not altogether surprising that Perrin and Mace Labourel, the priest who refused to church Madam Malet, eventually came to blows and that Perrin's letter sought pardon for Mace's death.

While the need to guard personal and family honor could have an impact on many aspects of life, churching feasts at which members of a family gathered to celebrate their own dignity were volatile situations. At Madam Desquetot's churching feast an argument started with verbal insults between Jourdain Garnier and John le Conte. John Desquetot became embroiled in the fight, perhaps defending his friend le Conte. Before it was over, the brawl included six people, including one woman, and had escalated into a knife fight in which a man was killed. The likelihood and violence of such situations were exacerbated by the fact that every feast seems to have included the consumption of wine, often apparently in large amounts. Drunkenness, a common and unsurprising aspect of such feasts, could easily encourage violence when someone's honor was at stake. It was, for example, the defense of personal and family honor during a churching feast that resulted in a fight between John Larchier and Aubin Alouf.

> Around the Feast of All Saint's just passed, [John] Larchier went one Sunday to a churching feast for the wife of Michael Fontaine where he dined and made good cheer and drank so much and was so full of the spirit of wine that he stumbled in drunkenness. And on this occasion, as he was greatly agitated from the drink, there was a dispute and quarrelsome words arose between Larchier and the wife of a man named Fabien Marie who said several insulting things to Larchier. On account of this, Larchier took a pewter tankard in his hand and tried to hit her. At this, a man named Aubin Alouf, who was married to the sister of Fabien Marie, diverted the tankard, prevented it from striking her, and held back the blow. And he pushed Larchier with such great force that he shoved him outside the building and closed the door on his heels so that he could not return.[25]

John was booted out of the celebration because he was, as we would say today, falling-down drunk and, consequently, got into a fight. The fight began when John felt he had been insulted by Madam Marie. He reacted to her words violently, striking out at her in defense of his honor. Madam Marie was in turn defended by Aubin Alouf who was married to her sister-in-law. The need to defend honor and family eventually ended in the death of Alouf who followed Larchier from the feast and fought with him again.

The fact that this fight happened at a *feste de gesine* was, perhaps, accidental but festivals and celebrations were often the site of such violence. Because the fête provided families with the opportunity to display their wealth and status, it was also an occasion for arguments over these issues. At the annual Fête de l'Epinette held by the bourgeoisie of Lille, the honorary title of king indicated a family's growing prestige among members of their class. By the late fifteenth century, violence surrounding the title had become so great that it was impossible to find anyone willing to assume the

role.[26] The point here is not that a *feste des relevailles* was likely to dissolve into a knife-fight but rather that men, and sometimes women, would go to great lengths to preserve and defend the sense of honor connected to such festivities. It is likely that Perrin included the extended story of his frustrated churching preparations in his letter of remission precisely because it went a long way toward making his anger against the priest, Mace, understandable. It was understandable under the circumstances, Perrin seems to be saying that he acted to defend himself and his family's honor, which Mace had so seriously damaged.

The social character of churching feasts and their potential to enhance or ruin a husband's reputation, important as they were, were not the only public dimension of a churching celebration that had broad consequences. Perrin Malet was also concerned that his wife's celebration at the parish be done at the correct time, with the correct women, and according to local custom. This ensured that she, personally, would receive the honor accorded to proper wives. It also ensured that her churching would be properly conducted in the sight of the parish community. This communal celebration was important to Perrin, as a point of honor for his family, but also to the Church. In order for the legislation on churching to be an effective tool for shaping lay behavior, it was vital that the positive and negative effects of these regulations be acted out on a public stage. Churching was valuable for the men of medieval Church and society largely because it was a community affair.

The regulations themselves ensured this by insisting that the purification of new mothers should not be done in secret. Consider, for example, a statute issued by the bishop of Troyes in 1374.

> The priests should instruct the women of their parishes who have sought purification that when, rising from childbed, they come to church for the first time, they should do this respectably, at the decent and customary hour, not secretly but in the open, so that at this service respect for the Church may be demonstrated, the honor of marriage may be shown, and a legitimate birth may be acknowledged.[27]

No doubt the need for this legislation was the continued efforts of unwed or illicitly married mothers to procure illegal purifications in private. The bishop's directive called, therefore, for churching to be a public demonstration. Such regulations guaranteed not only that illegal purifications would be more difficult to obtain but, also, that the parish community would be involved in the celebration. They were the intended audience who watched and learned as some women were turned away from the church door while others were ceremoniously admitted with the Church's blessing.

The parish church often served as the town hall and the center of social life in the medieval village or neighborhood. Rituals enacted at the parish were therefore played out in a privileged arena, at the heart of the community. By insisting that churching be done publicly, at the time of a parish mass, the clergy allowed this simple rite a powerful role in parish life. Mary Douglas has argued that rituals serve to mark boundaries, identify insiders and outsiders, and make the margins of a social group visible.[28] She suggests that rituals are essential to the social life of any community. "It is not too much to say," she wrote, "that ritual is more to society than words are to thoughts. For it is very possible to know something and then finds words for it. But it is impossible to have social relations without symbolic acts."[29] From this perspective, rituals such as churching signified and solidified the identity of the community. The contours of this identity are difficult to determine, however, not only because the meaning of any ritual is complex and open to various interpretations, but also because the ideal community pictured in the ritual was constantly contested by the reality of human life.

By regulating churching in such a way as to exclude unwed and illicitly married mothers, the bishops declared their vision of the ideal community: one peopled by a pious and obedient laity. They knew, of course, that this was not the case. They were, perhaps, operating out of an understanding of ritual similar to that of Jonathan Smith who describes it "as a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension with the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things."[30] Perhaps the bishops were hoping that by acting as if the community were peopled with pious and obedient matrons, they might actually bring the reality closer to the ideal.

We can be sure that medieval parish communities were complex, diverse, and far from the episcopal ideal.[31] Lay presence at the mass was irregular, at best, although women were more likely to attend than men.[32] Drinking at the tavern and playing at dice on Sundays were far more popular. Much of the evidence concerning the behavior of the laity during mass (talking to one another, eyeing the opposite sex, shouting to the priest while he read the *prône*) hardly suggests devotion.[33] But alongside the evidence for such behaviors, we also find signs of devotion to saints and to the Eucharist, and references to the popularity of processions on Candlemas and Rogation Days.[34] Even though some scholars have described such practices as superstition rather than religion, they reflect the extent to which religious events permeated medieval life and connected medieval people with the cycles and rhythms of the Church.[35]

Parish communities were a mixture of all this. They no doubt included pious matrons as well as unwed mothers, parishioners who were deeply moved by the ritual of churching as well as those to whom it meant little,

men and women who considered churching an important moment as well as those who thought of it only as some passing thing that some women did. Whatever the precise make-up of the group assembled for the celebration of any given churching, the ritual nevertheless marked the boundaries of that group by including certain women and excluding others. How far this went to solidify people's sense of their parish community is impossible to say but, over a period of time and with frequent repetition, the ritual's consistent assertion that unwed and illicitly married mothers were outsiders must have had some effect on how these women were seen.

As important as the parish celebration and the family feast were as distinct events, they were also part of a larger celebration that actually began when a woman left her home to process to church with her female friends and midwives and ended after nightfall when she returned to her husband's bed. The entire day of a woman's churching was, in a sense, a "festival": a periodically recurrent social occasion in which all the members of a community, united by religious and historical bonds, participate either directly or indirectly in a series of coordinated events.[36] Churching was a periodically recurrent social occasion celebrated every time a woman had a child. In a village or neighborhood, this must have been a fairly frequent event. The celebrating community included all those connected to the new mother or her husband by long-standing family or neighborhood ties including some from other villages. But it also included villagers who participated only by observing the events as they unfolded. Although not everyone in a given village or neighborhood would celebrate every churching, they would all celebrate a festival of churching, perhaps several, throughout the year. They participated, both directly and indirectly in the events of the day: joining in or watching the procession to church, attending mass and watching the blessing, helping to prepare or enjoying the feast. Thus, the churching became a festival that extended beyond the boundaries of family and parish.

Festivals, like rituals, are complex phenomena. They are multivalent and polysemous with layers of meaning that are not always apparent at first glance.[37] Moreover, they make use of multiple symbols, actions, and artifacts to move the participants through the various stages of the celebration from beginning to end. The festival of churching had two important symbolic moments: the blessing of a new mother at the church and the feast given in her honor at her home. Each of these had meaning in its own right; but when we look at churching as a festival, they can be understood also as having "positional meaning," that is, meaning that derives from seeing them as two parts of a whole and, especially, as parts that occupy different spatial and temporal places within the single event of a churching festival.[38]

The liturgical event happened first and took place in the parish church. Here the members of the parish community served as audience but also as the community of friends and neighbors who welcomed the new mother back into their lives and activities. In this sense, the church service was a reaffirmation of village life. It reminded those present of their membership in the group and their place in the dynamics of village affairs. Even if the woman being churched was not a close neighbor or relative, everyone knew why she was there and the importance of the rite. They also knew that at some time in the future, they or a member of their family could be honored in the same way. The ritual of churching allowed members of the village to enjoy a sense of shared experience and of lives bound together by common values. Yet, like the parish service, the village celebration reinforced the marginal position of those who were excluded. Young men too poor to marry or women who gave birth outside of marriage could not hope to enjoy a public churching for themselves. The festival of churching served to make village identity visible and, in doing so, clearly marked those who failed to fit in.

The feast that followed took place in the home of the new mother. As part of this larger festival and from the perspective of the village community, the *feste des relevailles* celebrated not only the family of the new mother, but the idea of family itself. By celebrating the survival of the family, churching feasts rejoiced in the survival of French society itself through the creative and reproductive unit of the family. The *feste* was a long and rowdy party in the tradition of medieval feasts, which, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, were considered to be expressions of the triumph of life over death. Feasting called forth the image of humanity conquering the earth, not fearing it.[39] Perhaps it was this focus and meaning of the rite that made churching such an appealing and persistent aspect of life among the common people of medieval France. The need to know that hope existed and that tomorrow held promise would be powerful indeed in a world all too familiar with illness, food shortages, and the death of children in their infancy.

As a festival, then, the day of a woman's churching involved her entire community and expressed values that were widely shared by the group. Considering the day as a whole, however, also reveals a deeper, more personal layer of meaning for the individual woman, her husband, and the community in which they lived. Consciously or not, medieval women and their families recognized the progression of the festival (from procession, to church, to feast, to bed) since they honored the order of events. And it must have been clear to them, as it is to us, that the consistent figure throughout the festival of churching was the new mother. She was central to both symbolic moments of the celebration: the church service and the

family feast. Her identity, however, changed as the festival progressed. The liturgical rite recognized her individuality as a woman and her value as a mother, separate from her husband. She alone processed to the church with her midwives and friends, she alone was purified at the door; only she sat in the special seat assigned to new mothers for this event; the blessed bread was placed in her hands as she, alone, stood near the altar at the close of mass. So from the moment she left her home until the end of the mass, she alone was the focal point of the festival.

The *feste des relevailles*, on the other hand, emphasized her place as a member of the family unit and, within that unit, as a wife subordinate to her husband. The feast took place in her home, where she was the mistress of the house, but where her husband was clearly the master. The feast was given for her but her husband also had something to celebrate. She was accorded a place of honor but her husband's status and reputation were also being fêted. At the end of the feast, she and her husband would renew their sexual life for the first time since the birth of their child. The new mother, therefore, began the day as a woman among women and ended it as a wife beneath her husband.

For the husband, the events of the day were surely experienced quite differently. He did not play an active role in the procession to the church or in any of the events at the church. He received no special blessing and was not given a place of honor or privilege during the mass. He was not given blessed bread at the end of mass, it was given to his wife, instead. Even though he had arranged for the churching by contacting the priest and notifying his wife's friends, his role in the church service was that of passive observer. At the *feste des relevailles*, however, he was no longer invisible. The feast was at his home where he was master, though he shared the table with his wife. The guests were his friends and relatives as well as hers. If all worked out well, he hosted an event that brought him honor in the eyes of the community. The husband, therefore, began the day in the shadows and ended it as the master of ceremonies over a family feast at which he held the position of patriarch.

The *feste des relevailles*, then, was a significant event for both the new mother and her husband, but in very different ways. Both of them actively participated in the feast, though their roles were dictated by custom and gender expectations. These placed the woman in a subservient position even though she was the honoree at this particular feast, which came at the end of a day during which she had been accorded a place of special prominence. The *feste des relevailles* was a complex festivity for the new mother. It celebrated her, certainly, but in the context of her role as wife and mother in a patriarchal family. For the husband, the feast was a resumption of his usual place of privilege as head of the family, a position he had

stepped away from for a few hours earlier in the day. For both of them, the feast was a return to the status quo though that implied different things for each of them. The festival of churching ultimately confirmed traditional values and social hierarchy. It granted women a moment of individual honor but at the end of the day served to reinsert them into the patriarchal family.

Anthropologists argue that the social function and symbolic meaning of such festivities are related to the values of the group organizing the celebration. "Festive events," anthropologist Alessandro Falassi tells us, "enact and celebrate the worldview, social identity, historical roots, and ultimately the physical survival of the celebrating and feasting group."[40] The festival of churching moved a woman from the women's world of childbirth and lying-in, through purification at the church, to a place at the family dinner table and her husband's embrace. Through this festival, the community celebrated this transition and the ambivalent, though ultimately patriarchal, vision of women's place in society that it performed. The essential place of women in the survival of the community was recognized and women as proper mothers were blessed and honored. By engaging in this festival every time a decent wife bore her husband another child, the community recognized women's power as bearers of life while it reaffirmed and reasserted the superior power of men in the maintenance and control of social order.

This understanding of the celebration underlines the enormous flexibility of the rite as it existed in late medieval France. It was a women's rite that enhanced and perpetuated men's power and authority. I do not believe that this rite would have had the same potential had the bishops not redefined it as a rite that honored marriage. If it had remained only a ritual purification for mothers, all mothers, its value to men and wider French society would have been limited to its ability to remove the pollution that threatened sacred space and prohibited sexual intercourse. By redefining churching, the French bishops not only created a tool for their own disciplinary purposes but also greatly extended its usefulness and influence in their world. Churching remained a rite for all mothers, but took on added significance for married women, their pastors, husbands, families, and parish communities. Redefined churching and the festival of events that surrounded it offered something to everyone and, more importantly, helped to create and support essential social identities and the patriarchal structure of medieval society.

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

In 1913, a woman in Brittany prepared to make her way to church for her *relevailles*. Around her shoulders she wore a widows' shawl: a heavy cloak with a silver clasp and a hood that she pulled over her head to hide her face. As she left her home, she paused on the doorstep to give people a chance to turn away from her. Word had been passed from neighbor to neighbor and, by now, everyone knew that she was going to the church at three o'clock. So, the neighborhood women returned to their houses; the men she passed on her way busied themselves about something to be sure she was not noticed. When she came to the cemetery that surrounded the village church, she stepped over its low wall rather than going in through the open gate. Avoiding entering the front door of the church, she went instead to the porch set aside for baptism. The priest, having been warned in advance of her arrival, waited for her there dressed in a white stole and surplice. He handed her a lighted candle, aspersed her with holy water, and then, giving her the end of his stole, he led her into the church. As she knelt before the altar, the priest aspersed her again with holy water and recited over her a prayer of benediction. When the blessing was completed, the woman, removing her heavy cloak and uncovering her face, left the church with her head held high. She went out of the cemetery through the main gate. There, as if by accident, she found her friends and neighbors who happily gossiped with her about one thing and another but, especially, about her new baby.

Pierre-Jakez Hélias included this description of his mother's churching in his memoirs.[1] Reading this fascinating description of an early twentieth-century churching is a bit like watching a piece of local theater. The woman, her neighbors, and the parish priest each have their assigned roles, which they perform with care and precision. The woman's dress and her behavior identify her as the central character in the play. The drama reveals her transformation from a heavily cloaked, almost invisible figure into a well-known friend and neighbor. The churching of Madam Hélias was an apparently voluntary collaboration between the woman and her neighbors in a carefully devised script whose roots went back to the Middle Ages.

Although there are clear differences, there are also striking similarities between this event and the practice of churching in late medieval France. While Madam Hélias did not process to church in the company of her midwife and friends, she was met at the church door by the priest dressed in surplice and stole. There he blessed her and, as in the manuscript from Boulogne-sur-Mer, led her into church with the end of his stole. There was no parish mass but the new mother was allowed to approach the altar where she received another blessing. Following her churching, she was greeted and celebrated by her friends and neighbors, though the great family feast had been held earlier on the day of her baby's baptism.

The author of the text noted that the custom of cloaking the new mother on her way to church, as if she had something to be ashamed of, was unnecessary because marriage had given her the right to become a mother. Nevertheless, he observed, an obscure feeling of guilt remained connected with the yearly feast of the Virgin Mary's purification. In spite of their married status, women endured a certain state of disgrace until they returned to church and received this blessing. The twentieth-century Breton practice of churching seems to have been a social custom orchestrated and expected by the laity rather than the Church, but a memory of its roots in a rite of purification lingered.

The customs surrounding churching have changed over time, but the practice has not yet disappeared. The *Book of Common Prayer* for the Anglican Church still contains a service for women after childbirth, although it is clearly a prayer of thanksgiving. As I was working on this manuscript, I learned that my mother had been churched after the birth of each of her six children. In her Midwestern Catholic parish during the 1940s and 1950s, the women referred to it as "Mary's Blessing." There was no prescribed period of staying away from church nor was the blessing obligatory, but on their first Sunday at church after the birth, if they chose, new mothers knelt at the communion rail after mass and the priest said a prayer for them. It was a simple recognition of a new mother: no fanfare, no guilt, no party after. And, after presenting a portion of my research at a conference in 2000, a woman told me that she had been (unwittingly!) churched after the birth of her son a few years before.[2] In all of these twentieth-century anecdotes, churching no longer has the form or significance it held in the Middle Ages, but it continues to be a meaningful practice for some Christians.

When Queen Richildis was purified after the birth of her son in 875, she was engaging in a ritual of cultic purity. The early medieval Church, concerned that sacred space and the mysteries priests performed in them not suffer from blood pollution, required this purification for all mothers. Until the end of the Middle Ages, clerical descriptions of churching

retained an understanding of it as a rite of purification founded on a constant belief in the polluting effects of women's bodies. This underlying belief in women's pollution was widely accepted by medieval men and women. In many cases, lay women and men sought churching as a relief to this pollution. It is hard to imagine that this persistent idea, constantly reaffirmed and recreated in the liturgy of churching, did not play a role in maintaining women's subservient position in medieval society.

Over time, however, the understanding of this pollution changed; concern for sacred space gave way to concern for the conjugal debt. As a rite that purified wives from dangerous humors in order that they might resume their responsibility to pay the conjugal debt, churching retained its value in the more rational and "scientific" world of the high and later Middle Ages. Connecting purification after childbirth with the conjugal debt had enormous consequences. It allowed French bishops to redefine the rite as one that honored marriage and to issue legislation that made it a privilege for the properly married. Being allowed a solemn churching signified a woman's status as a legitimately married mother. Those to whom the rite was forbidden were marked as sinners. Priests were granted the right to withhold the ritual from those they knew to be unworthy. Those considered worthy could take an honored place within the parish family and, so, husbands came to enjoy celebrity and status at the churching of their wives. Though churching in the ninth century had also protected male privilege, the rite's ability to do this was greatly strengthened by connecting it to marital sex and the sacrament of marriage.

By making churching a privilege granted to properly married mothers, the bishops ensured that, at least occasionally, the rite would become a struggle between a woman's desire for churching and ecclesiastical efforts to control access to the rite. Thus, churching became a site of struggle and the contestation of power. The efforts of married women and their husbands to control churching conflicted with the interests of their parish priest. The bishops' efforts to control churching conflicted with the intentions of unwed or illicitly married mothers. Required by law to act as witness to legitimate births, midwives could find that churching placed them at odds with their clients and the women of their communities. Although such conflicts suggest the importance of churching to various groups, they also tell us something about the nature of power dynamics within medieval society.

As Michel Foucault argued, power is not an abstract thing held in the hands of any one group. Rather, it is a dynamic, a verb, an active part of the relationships between people. An unwed mother, such as Gilbetra la Cousatur, was not powerless though her options were more limited than those of proper matrons or the local bishop. The inequality in this power

equation resulted from the fact that regulating churching allowed it to become an exercise of disciplinary power, which Foucault defined as the "art of correct training" used to normalize social categories. This training is achieved through a process that compares, differentiates, establishes hierarchies, and excludes.[3] Although Foucault saw these dynamics at work in the nineteenth century, medieval bishops employed a similar strategy by issuing and enforcing statutes regulating access to the public celebration of churching. The regulations encouraged comparison between married and unmarried mothers, forced people to recognize the difference between these groups in the eyes of the Church, granted married mothers a higher status in the parish community, and excluded unmarried mothers from "the society of good women."

Apparently the bishops hoped that such legislation would train lay women to accept their proper place in the medieval order and encourage them to play their roles as dutiful wives and mothers. Thus, churching acted as a potent form of productive power, producing identity through the act of disciplining. It produced the identity of properly married wife and mother as appropriate and praiseworthy, setting such women forward as examples of the ideal toward which all sexually active women ought to strive. This is not to say that every woman who was churched identified unquestioningly with the bishops' notion of wife and mother. As a number of scholars have argued, medieval women and men were capable of resisting the pressures of social construction, even the considerable pressures applied by the medieval Church, and worked to shape their own, distinct identities.[4] The actions of unwed mothers remind us, in fact, that some women actively resisted the identities the bishops sought to construct. But while such individual actions may have modified the impact of the regulations, they could not completely negate the disciplinary power of the legislation to shape and influence the perception of who was and was not a proper Christian wife.

In addition to affecting social identity, the regulation of churching also served to normalize the contours of the parish community and the Christian family. It helped to enforce the authority of the parish priest, giving him a superior status that appeared to be God-given, natural, part of the divine order. It reinforced the position of the laity as obedient subjects called to conform to the moral codes established for them by ecclesiastical authority. It encouraged the laity to adopt the Church's definition of marriage and family. These are, of course, some of the effects of religious rituals in general but the regulation of churching acted out, as it was, regularly and on a public stage strengthened the ability of the rite to work in these ways. By turning churching into the privilege of properly married mothers, medieval bishops also enhanced clerical power and intensified the ritual's

ability to create and reinforce essential social categories within local Christian communities.

It is possible, then, to understand the history of churching as a dialogue between the laity and the authorities of the church. Communication between the hierarchy and the laity was not always top–down but, in this case, was based upon different experiences and appreciations of a common medieval practice. If churching was not understood as a status symbol for proper matrons and their families before the twelfth century, it certainly was perceived as that by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. As we have seen, this definition of the rite was not inherent in its liturgical celebration nor in the way clerical authors described it. Yet, churching feasts and the efforts of families, such as the Grossins and the Malets, to ensure their wives a proper churching reveal that, by the late Middle Ages, the laity clearly understood churching as a sign and celebration of family honor. The ecclesiastical initiatives to control churching, borne out of the twelfth-century reforms, were intended to enforce the Church's ideas about marriage. The laity's reactions to this legislation made churching into a celebration of social status, especially for men. Such reciprocal influence, with lay activity prompting clerical action, which in turn had an impact on lay attitudes and understandings, was no doubt a common phenomenon. Nevertheless, the use and importance of churching to both the laity and ecclesiastical authorities serve to demonstrate the interrelatedness of these elements of medieval society.

This power dynamic is especially important for the study of women in the Middle Ages because churching belonged to and was shaped by the ordinary, common women of medieval France. Although upper-class women, such as the daughters of the Knight of La Tour Landry, no doubt celebrated the rite of churching, their voices are only whispers in the sources. Nor is there any reason to think that Richildis was the only medieval French queen to be purified after the birth of her children. Still, we have no stories about the churching of royal mothers. What we do have are the stories of ordinary women being churched at local parishes and celebrated or marginalized in local communities. The common thread in their stories is their desire to be churched. We cannot see their motivations directly; we know that their actions were often influenced by family concerns and the interests of husbands or lovers. Yet, the importance of churching in the lives of most late medieval women is apparent. We do not know, of course, how many French mothers ignored churching entirely but the efforts of families such as the Malets and the actions of mothers like Gilbetra la Cousatur reflect a strong, personal desire for churching shared by many late medieval women.

In spite of its ability to advance male privilege and traditional authority, the strength of churching as a women's rite was nonetheless real. The

unwed mothers and prostitutes who sought purification without any hope of honor or status prove that it had another value for women. Indeed, churching celebrated an important aspect of women's power, their ability to give birth and thereby ensure the continuation of their families. The public festival of churching was, in part, the social recognition of that power. Women's efforts to control churching and their understanding of the liturgy as a moment of personal celebration reveal that women's understanding of their own power was not limited to patriarchal definitions of them as submissive wives or clerical attitudes toward them as sources of sexual temptation.

This pursuit of churching by ordinary women also reveals their sense of themselves. Many women apparently believed that they deserved the attention that churching brought them as individuals and members of a family. The actions of the women described in this book suggests that most medieval women accepted the idea that childbirth left them polluted in a way that endangered their sexual partners. But it also suggests that they experienced the resolution of this pollution as a powerful and positive event. Women knew that they had a unique set of physical and spiritual needs directly related to the act of giving birth. Their efforts to be churched suggest that they recognized their right to have these needs addressed. At the same time, they accepted the idea that their bodies, especially their sexual bodies, played a large role in determining who they were as members of their society. They took care of themselves with a determination that suggests an underlying belief in their own self-worth, albeit one shaped by the patriarchal definitions of their world. Churching, thus, provides us with a window into the beliefs and attitudes of many ordinary women toward themselves and their ability to give birth.

Churching was, thus, an integral part of medieval society valuable to many different groups for different reasons and accomplishing far more than the purification of women after childbirth. Its historical importance, however, was not its ability to heal and empower women, display and bestow social prestige, or allow for the exercise of power, though it did all this. Churching was important because of its ability to establish and maintain social boundaries within medieval society while also assuring that these boundaries remained flexible and open to manipulation. Churching set the boundary between the pure and the polluted: between the proper wife and illegitimate mother, between the celibate clergy and sexually active laity. At the same time, it was the ground upon which these categories were disrupted and called into question. The medieval celebration of churching left its mark on history because it served to continually define, disrupt, and redefine essential concepts and categories.

As a constructive element in the social and cultural life of medieval France, the power of churching lies in its pervasive and consistent intrusion into the ordinary lives of ordinary people. Historical sources seldom emphasize the minutia of everyday life and the impact of daily events on the way people believe and act. The ordinariness of churching has made it nearly invisible in the sources and, perhaps as a consequence, historians have, until recently, largely ignored the ritual apparently equating invisibility with insignificance. It was precisely its ordinariness, however, that made churching a powerful element in the lives of medieval people. As a ritual of purification dating back to the ninth century and repeated over and over in parish services every time a woman in the community had a child, churching was a constant part of people's lives. The opportunities it created to express social meaning, to perform roles and identities, to allow people the chance to identify with or react against certain social categories and limitations were enormous. Churching was important because it was a common ritual that helped to shape and maintain the basic contours of medieval society. It is important to us, as historians of medieval society, because of that role and the insight churching, therefore, provides into the way the women and men of medieval France conceived of their world and dealt with its possibilities and constraints.

NOTES

Introduction

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18. For the history of continental penitentials and their use as sources, see Raymund Kottje, "Eine wenig beachtete Quelle zur Sozialgeschichte: Die frühmittelalterlichen Bussbücher—Probleme ihrer Erforschung," *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial—und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* 73 (1986): 63–72 and "Erfassung und Untersuchungen der frühmittelalterlichen kontinentalen Bussbücher. Probleme, Ergebnisse, Aufgaben eines Forshungprojektes an der Universitäte Bonn," *Studi medievali*, third series, 26 (1985): 941–50; Cyrille Vogel, *Les "Libri Paenitentiales,"* Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1978); Pierre J. Payer, "Confession and the Study of Sex in the Middle Ages" in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Vern Bullough and James Brundage (New York: Garland, 1996),

pp. 3–8 and 25–28; John Thomas McNeill, *The Celtic Penitentials and Their Influence on Continental Christianity* (Paris: Édouard Champion, 1923); Thomas P. Oakley, "The Penitentials as Sources for Medieval History," *Speculum* 15.2 (1940): 210–23. On penitentials in general, see Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983); Thomas P. Oakley, *English Penitential Discipline and Anglo-Saxon Law in Their Joint Influences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1923); Raymund Kottje, "Bussbücher," *Lexicon des Mittelalters* 2 (1982): 1118–22; Cyrille Vogel, *Le Pécheur et la pénitence au Moyen Age* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1969); Gabriel Le Bras, "Pénitentiels," *DTC* 12 (1933): 1160–79; John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938).

19. The eighth-century *Capitula judicorum* (also known as *Poenitentiale XXXV capitulorum*), *Haltigar, Martenianum, Pseudo-Theodore*, all of the ninth century, and the tenth- or eleventh-century *Arundel* are of Frankish origin. The *Sangallense tripartite* (eighth or ninth century), *Vallicellanum E.62*, and *Casinense* (both ninth century) also have a Frankish origin although they spread to Italy beginning at the end of the ninth century and are thus classified as pseudo-Roman. The *Floriacense* and *Parisiense* were produced on the continent in the eighth century and are closely connected to the Frankish *Burgundian*. The *Excarpsus Cummeani* (eighth century) was modeled on the *Parisiense*; the *Remense* (ninth century) was modeled on the *Martenianum*. I am following here the classification of Cyrille Vogel in "*Libri paenitentiales*," pp. 59–94. I include the *Bigotianum* (eighth century) as a continental source, although Vogel lists it as insular, because it was produced either in Brittany or at the monastery of Fécamp in Normandy. On the origins of the *Bigotianum*, see McNeill and Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks*, p. 148.
20. Oakley, "Penitentials as Sources," 217.
21. Regino of Prüm, *Corrector*, *PL* 132: 187–400; Burchard of Worms, *Decretum*, *PL* 140: 949–1018.
22. Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum*, *PL* 161: 47–1036.
23. I am using the term confessors' manual in its broadest sense to include both *summas confessorum* and works considered *summas confessionis* or manuals for confessors. Important works on the history of confessors' manuals and their use as historical sources include: Pierre Michel-Quantin, *Sommes de casuistique et manuels de confession au moyen âge, (XII–XVI siècles)*, Analecta Mediaevalia Namurcensia 13 (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1962); Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); Leonard E. Boyle, "*Summa confessorum*," in *Les Genres littéraires dans les sources théologiques et philosophiques médiévales. Definition, critiques et exploitation*, Actes du colloque internationale de Louvain-la-Neuve, 25–27 May 1981 (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain, 1982), pp. 227–37; Pierre Payer, "Sin and Confession in the Thirteenth Century," in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce Salisbury (New York: Garland, 1991), pp. 126–42 and "Confession and the Study of Sex," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*,

pp. 3–31. Also see the debate between Tentler and Boyle, which includes Tentler's articles "The Summa for Confessors as an Instrument of Social Control" and "Response and Retractatio" and Boyle's "The Summa for Confessors as a Genre, and Its Religious Intent," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medeival and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trinkhaus and Heiko Obermann (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), pp. 103–37.

24. Especially helpful works on the history of sermons, their production and dissemination in medieval France are Jean Longère, *La Prédication médiévale* (Paris: Études Augustiennes, 1983); L.-J. Bataillon, "Approaches to the Study of Medieval Sermons," *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 11 (1980): 19–35; David L. d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars: Sermons Diffused from Paris before 1300* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Larissa Taylor, *Soldiers of Christ: Preaching in Late Medieval and Reformation France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Michel Zink, *La Prédication en langue romane avant 1300* (Paris: H. Campion, 1976); Nicole Bériou, *L'avènement des maîtres de la parole: La Predication à Paris au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1998).
25. On the use of sermons as historical sources, see David L. d'Avray, "Methods in the Study of Medieval Sermons," in *Modern Questions about Medieval Sermons: Essays on Marriage, Death, History, and Sanctity*, ed. Nicole Bériou and David L. d'Avray (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi Sull'alto Medioevo, 1994), pp. 3–29 and Bataillon, "Approaches to the Study of Medieval Sermons," 19–35.
26. For an analysis and summary of these sermons directed at married couples, see David L. d'Avray and M. Tausche, "Marriage Sermons in *Ad Status* Collections of the Central Middle Ages," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 47 (1980): 71–119.
27. On diocesan assemblies and synodal statutes, see the works of Odette Pontal, *Les Statuts synodaux*, Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975) and "Les Plus anciens statuts synodaux d'Angers et leurs expansion dans les diocèses de l'Ouest de la France," *Revue historique de l'église de France* 46 (1960): 54–67 and Odette Pontal, ed., *Les Statuts de Paris et le synodal de l'ouest (XIIIe siècle)*, Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France 9 (Paris: CTHS, 1971), pp. xxv–lxxvii. See also C.R. Cheney, *English Synodalia of the Thirteenth Century*, second edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Joseph Avril, "L'evolution du synode diocésain, principalement dans la France du Nord du Xe au XIIIe siècle," in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Medieval Canon Law*, Monumenta Iuris Canonici, Series C: Subsidia 8, ed. Peter Linehan (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1988), pp. 305–25 and "Naissance et évolution des législations synodales dans les diocèses du Nord et de l'Ouest de la France (1200–1250)," in *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte* 72 (Vienna: Hermann Böhlaus, 1986), pp. 152–249.
28. For a list of existing statutes and their editions, see André Artonne, Louis Guizard, and Odette Pontal, *Repertoire des statuts synodaux des diocèses de l'ancienne France du XIIIe á la fin du XVIIIe siècles*, second edition (Paris: CNRS, 1969).

29. For the development of the *officialité*, see Jean-François Lemarignier, Jean Gaudemet, and Guillaume Mollat, *Institutions écclésiastiques*, Histoire des institutions françaises au moyen âge 3 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), pp. 257–73 and 357–60; also, old but still very useful is Paul Fournier, *Les Officialités au moyen âge* (Paris: Plon, 1880).
30. Fournier, *Les Officialités*, pp. 41–57.
31. On letters of remission as historical sources, see Pierre Braun, "La valeur documentaire des lettres de rémission," in *La Faute, la répression et le pardon*, Actes du 107e Congrès national des sociétés savantes, Brest, 1982 (Paris: CTHS, 1984), pp. 207–21. The number of letters for the early modern period is even larger and has been explored by a number of historians and scholars. See Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987) and her list of scholarly works, p. 3, n. 4.
32. Queens and other secular princes were sometimes accorded the right to pardon, although they usually used the right only on the occasion of their first entry into a city or village. On this, see Francis Molard, *Esquisses de moeurs senonaises aux XIVe et XVe siècle d'après des lettres de rémission* (Sens: P. Duchemin, 1895), pp. 3–4.
33. Series JJ. Not all letters of remission are in the Trésor des Chartes. Some are in regional collections or police archives although these collections have not been included in this study.
34. I looked at about 4,000 letters written between 1300, when the number of letters and the topics they cover begin to expand, and 1500. I found only 22 references to churching, including 16 to churching feasts. To sample the vast collection in the Trésor des Chartes, I read letters from the first 5 years out of every 50; that is, 1300–05, 1350–55, 1400–05, 1450–55, and 1499. I also read any letters mentioned in secondary sources as having a specific reference to churching as well as letters in edited collections, such as Paul le Cacheux's *Actes de la chancellerie d'Henri VI concernant la Normandie sous la domination anglaise (1422–1435) extraits des registres du Trésors des Chartes aux Archives Nationales*, 2 vols. (Paris: A. Lestringant, 1907–08).
35. In sixteenth-century law, murders could be pardoned for a variety of reasons including sudden anger or drunkenness, both situations in which the perpetrator was deemed to be acting without ill-will and under the influence of strong emotion. Other reasons included revenge for the adultery of a wife or daughter, self-defense, youth or old-age when no other record of crime existed, imprudence, or accident. See Davis, *Fiction in the Archives*, p. 12.
36. See Charles Du Cange, *Glossarium mediae et infimae Latinitatis* (Niort, 1884), 4:62.
37. Roger Vaultier, *Le Folklore pendant la Guerre de Cent Ans d'après les lettres de rémission du Trésor des Chartes* (Paris: Librairie Guénégaud, 1965).
38. John "made good cheer with several of his friends who were gathered there because of the feast and churching of his wife who had been in childbed and had gotten up that day." JJ 175, fol. 38v, printed in le Cacheux, *Actes de la chancellerie d'Henri VI*, 2:195.

39. For the location and identification of manuscripts, I relied heavily on the works of Victor Leroquais, *Les Sacramentaires et missels manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France* (Paris, 1924); *Les Livres d'heures de la bibliothèque nationale* (Paris, 1927); and *Les Pontificaux manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1937).

Chapter 1 *Cum Lumine et Oblatione*

1. *Annales de Saint-Bertin*, ed. Felix Grat, Jeanne Vielliard, and Suzanne Clémencet (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1964), p. 197. Anno Domini DCCCLXXV. Karolus circa initium quadragesimae monasterium Sancti Dyonisii adiit, ubi et Pascha Domini celebrauit. Et Richildis, uxor eius, noctu ante quartam feriam Paschae aborsu filium peperit qui baptizatus mox obiit. Illaque dies purificationis (suae) post parturitionem in eodem monasterio expectante, Karolus ad Basiuum perrexit indeque ad laetanias celebrandas ante Ascensionem Domini ad monasterium Sancti Dyonisii rediit et vigilia Pentecoste ad Compendium venit.
2. Lev. 15.24. (All Scriptural citations are taken from the Vulgate.) Si coerit cum ea vir tempore sanguinis menstrualis, immundus erit septem diebus. . . [If a husband has intercourse with her during the time of menstrual bleeding, he will be unclean for seven days. . .].
3. Lev. 12.1–6. Locutusque est Dominus ad Moysen dicens: Loquere filiis Israel et dices ad eos: Mulier, si suscepto semine pepererit masculum, immunda erit septem diebus iuxta dies separationis menstruae. Et die octavo circumcidetur infantulus: ipsa vero triginta tribus diebus manebit in sanguine purificationis suae. Omne sanctum non tanget, nec ingredietur in sanctuarium, donec impleantur dies purificationis suae. Sin autem feminam pepererit, immunda erit duabus hebdomadibus iuxta ritum fluxus menstrui, et sexaginta sex diebus manebit in sanguine purificationis suae. Cumque expleti fuerint dies purificationis suae, pro filio, sive pro filia, deferet agnum anniculum in holocaustum. . .
4. Rushton, "Purification or Social Control," p. 122.
5. Gibson, "Blessing from Sun and Moon," p. 142.
6. Coster, "Purity and Profanity," p. 377. Coster's reference to the Western liturgy in the eleventh century is accurate; he is referring to German texts some of which have been edited. See Adolph Franz, ed., *Das Rituale von St. Florian aus dem zwölften jahrhundert* (Freiburg: Herder, 1904) and Walter von Arx, ed., *Das Klosterrituale von Biburg* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1970).
7. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual*, p. 73.
8. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Ritual*, p. 74.
9. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:213–40 with discussion of the origins of the rite on pages 214–15.
10. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:215.
11. On the Canons of Hippolytus, see Wilhelm Riedel, *Die Kirchenrechtsquellen des Patriarchats Alexandrien* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1900), pp. 193–200; Hugh

Connolly, *The So-Called Egyptian Church Order and Derived Documents*, originally published in 1916, reprinted in *Texts and Studies* 8.4, ed. J. Armitage Robinson (Nendeln: Kraus, 1967); Burton Scott Easton, *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus Translated into English and with Introduction and Notes* (1934; repr. Hamden, CT: Archon Press, 1962), pp. 1–16; Jean Gaudemet, *Les Sources du droit de l'église en occident du IIe au VIIe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985), pp. 15–28; Maurice Geerard, *Patres antenicaeni*, Clavis Patrum Graecorum 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), p. 234 (#1742).

12. Canons of Hippolytus, c. 18, Riedel, *Die Kirchenrechtsquellen*, pp. 209–10.
13. Gaudemet, *Les Sources du droit*, pp. 20–21. Gaudemet uses the date 336–340 assigned the Canons by R.G. Coquin but also notes that Bernard Botte dated the Canons to 361–363.
14. See Easton, *Apostolic Tradition*, p. 15; Gregory Dix, ed., *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus, Bishop and Martyr* (1937; reissued with corrections, preface, and bibliography by Henry Chadwick, London: SPCK, 1968), p. liii; Johannes Quasten, *Patrology* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1953), 2:186.
15. Dix, *Apostolic Tradition*, pp. lxxvi–lxxvii. H. Achelis set forth this argument in *Die Canones Hippolyti* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1891).
16. On Jewish notions of purity, see Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), especially pp. 11, 38, and 41; and Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Un Temps pour embrasser: Aux origins de la morale sexuelle occidentale (VIe—XIe siècle)*, Collection de l'univers historique (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1983), especially p. 78.
17. Judith Romney Wegner, *Chattel or Person? The Status of Women in the Mishnah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 165.
18. Nancy Jay, *Throughout Your Generations Forever* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 29.
19. Rachel Biale, *Women and Jewish Law: An Exploration of Women's Issues in Halakhic Sources* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), pp. 156–58.
20. Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, pp. 159–60.
21. Lawrence Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 148. Also see the reference to this idea in Jay, *Throughout Your Generations*, p. 107.
22. Hoffman, *Covenant*, pp. 147–72. For other explanations of Jewish menstrual taboos, see Leonie J. Archer, "Bound by Blood: Circumcision and Menstrual Taboo in Post-Exilic Judaism," in *After Eve*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice (London: Marshal Pickering, 1990), pp. 38–61 and " 'In thy blood live': Gender and Ritual in the Judaeo-Christian Tradition," in *Through the Devil's Gateway: Women, Religion, and Taboo*, ed. Alison Joseph (London: SPCK, 1990), pp. 22–49.
23. Hoffman, *Covenant*, p. 172.
24. Judith Baskin, "The Separation of Women in Rabbinic Judaism," in *Women, Religion, and Social Change*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Ellison Banks Findly (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 7.

25. Wegner, *Chattel or Person*, pp. 164–65.
26. Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*, p. 153. Interestingly, Biale believes that women imposed this additional seven-day period of impurity on themselves. One wonders if their motivation was a concern for purity itself, for their husbands, or perhaps for themselves.
27. Hoffman, *Covenant*, pp. 190–207.
28. Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publications Society of America, 1981) and *How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).
29. Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism*, pp. 109–111.
30. Biale, *Women and Jewish Law,* pp. 172–74.
31. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 88. The term "Burned Over" region is usually applied to parts of upstate New York that experienced repeated waves of radical preaching and Christian revival movements during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; see Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790–1865* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 60–104.
32. Brown, *Body and Society*, pp. 86–89.
33. Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 78.
34. James Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 64. Also, see Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 16–93 for a discussion and gender-sensitive analysis of similar ideas in the late antique and early medieval church.
35. Brown, *Body and Society*, pp. 173–74.
36. Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 195; also, see pp. 192–95.
37. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 64.
38. Jerome, *Contra Helvidium*, *PL* 23:202. Junge si libet et alias naturae contumelias, novem mensibus uterum insolescentem, fastidia, partum, sanguinem, pannos. Ipse tibi describatur infans, tegmine membranorum solito convolutus. Ingerantur dura praesepia, vagitus parvuli, octavae diei circumcisio, tempus purgationis, ut probetur immundus.
39. Augustine *Contra Faustum* 23.2, *PL* 42:467; Rufinus of Aquileia, *Expositio symboli* 10, in *Opera*, ed. Manlius Simonetti, *CCSL* 20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1961), pp. 147–48.
40. Bede included the correspondence between Gregory and Augustine in his history of the English church. *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 90 and 91. Their translation.
41. Herman Joseph Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher und die Bussdisciplin der Kirche*, Nach handschriftlichen Quellen dargestellt 1 (1883; repr., Graz: Akademische Druck-u Verlagsanstalt, 1958), p. 531, canons 6, 9, and 12 (hereafter Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher* 1).

42. See Pierre Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials. The Development of a Sexual Code, 550–1150* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984). Also Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 154–64.
43. Ludwig Bieler, ed., *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), pp. 114–115.
44. Bieler, *The Irish Penitentials*, pp. 126–27.
45. The penitential of Fleury, Herman Joseph Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher und das kanonische Bussverfahren*, Nach handschriftlichen Quellen dargestellt 2 (1898; repr., Graz: Akademische Druck-u Verlagsanstalt, 1958), p. 344 (hereafter Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher* 2).
46. *Hubertense* c. 57, F.W.H. Wasserschleben, ed., *Die Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche* (Halle: C. Graeger, 1851), p. 385.
47. For example, see the *Pseudo-Theodore* in Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 577; the *Sangallense tripartite* in Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 2:183; the *Vallicellanum* in Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 560.
48. *Floriacense* c. 50, Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 2:344.
49. *Sangallense tripartite* 34a, Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 2:183–84; *Capitula iudiciorum* 9:1, Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 2:226; *Casinense* c. 50, Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:411; *Vallicellanum* E.62 c. 26, Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 560. The *Vallicellanum* differs slightly from the other penitentials in addressing this prohibition to the man rather than the woman.
50. *Martenianum* c. 68, Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 298.
51. *Bigotianum* 9:3, Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 451. *Haltigar* c. 24, Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:727.
52. *Arundel* c. 57, Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:453.
53. *Remense* 5:56, Franz Bernd Asbach, "Das Poenitentiale Remense und der sogen. Excarpsus Cummeani" (Ph.D. diss., University of Regensburg, 1975), p. 37.
54. *Parisiense* c. 120, Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:694; *Excarpsus Cummeani* 3:15, Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:623; *Martenianum* c. LXVI:3, Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, pp. 297–98; *Pseudo-Theodore* c. II:8, Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 577.
55. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, p. 143.
56. For the *Bigotianum*, see Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 451, C. IX *De continentia matrimonii*, c. 3. Mulier tres menses debet se abstinere a viro quando concepit ante partum et post tempora purgationis, hoc est XL dies et noctes. . .For the *Haltigar*, see Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:727, XXIII *De questionibus conjugiorum*. The text of the canon in both penitentials is the same.
57. Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:453.
58. Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:453.
59. *Theodore* c. 9:105, 106, 107, in Paul Willem Finsterwalder, *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Überlieferungsformen* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus, 1929), p. 278.
60. Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:694. c. 119: Mulieres non intrent in ecclesiam menstruo tempore neque communicent nec sanctimoniales nec laicae; si

praesumant, III ebdomada peniteant. c. 120: Similiter, qui intrant in ecclesiam ante mundum sanguinem post partum, XL dies peniteant. c. 121: Qui nupserit etiam his temporibus, XX dies peniteat. For the *Excarpsus*, see: Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher*, 1:623, c. 14, 15, 16; for the *Remense*, see: Asbach, "Das Poenitentiale Remense," p. 37, c. 55, 56, 57.

61. Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, pp. 90 and 91. Their translation.
62. *Martenianum* c. LXVIII, Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 298. Ad ejus concubitum vir suus acceder non debet, quoad usque qui gignitur ablactetur. Prava autem consuetudo in conjugatorum moribus surrexit, ut mulieres filios, quos gignunt, nutrire contemnant, eos aliis mulieribus ad nutriendum tradant, quod videlicet ex sola causa incontinentiae videtur. Attamen nisi purgationis tempus transierit, viris suis non debent misceri.
63. *Martenianum* c. LXVI:3, Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, pp. 297–98. Cum vero enixa fuerit mulier, qua die debeat ecclesiam intrare, testamenti veteris praeceptione didicisti. . .Si itaque enixam mulierem prohibemus ecclesiam intrare, ipsam ei poenam suam in culpam deputamus.
64. Vogel, *Libri Paenitentiales*, p. 82.
65. Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 577. C. 2:2. Mulier III menses abstineat se a viro ante partum, quando concipit, et post partum XL diebus et noctibus,. . . .Qui autem nupserit his diebus, XL dies poeniteat. Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 577. C. 2:8. Mulieres menstruo tempore non introeant aecclesiam neque communicent, nec sanctaemoniales nec laicae. Si praesumat, III dies poeniteant. Similiter poeniteant, quae intrant aecclesiam ante mundum sanguinem post partum, id est, XL dies.
66. See, for example, the *Remense* c. 5:3, Asbach, "Das Poenitentiale Remense," p. 31.
67. *Pseudo-Theodore* c. 2 (17): 2, Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 577. Mulier III menses abstineat se a viro ante partum, quando concipit, et post partum XL diebus et noctibus, sive masculum, sive feminam genuerit, et tunc cum lumine et oblatione intret aeclessiam.
68. Notions of blood pollution in the central and later Middle Ages are explored in chapter 3.
69. This account follows that of Dorothy C. Shorr, "The Iconographic Development of the Presentation of the Temple," *Art Bulletin* 28 (1946): 17–32.
70. Bede, *De ratione temporum* 12, *PL* 90:351.
71. For example, see Ivo of Chartres's sermon for the Feast of the Purification in *PL* 162:576. Also, see Gail McMurray Gibson's description of the Candlemas procession and a discussion of the meaning of the candle in late medieval England in "Blessing from Sun and Moon," pp. 139–43.
72. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:214.
73. *Chroniques des comtes d'Anjou et d'Amboise*, ed. Louis Halphen and René Poupardin (Paris: A. Picard, 1913), p. 99. Multi ex hominibus Hugonis cito accurrentes, ab illis susceptis, turrim intraverunt et uxorem Roberti de Avessiaco, que intus parturierat, nec tempus purificationis ejus instabat, in

lecto suo usque ad domum viri sui, que non longe a porta arcis erat, detulerunt.

74. Charles LaLore, ed., *Cartulaire de Montier-la-Celle*, *Collection des principaux cartulaires du diocèse de Troyes* 6 (Paris: Thorin, 1882), p. 271, charter #228. De reconcilitionibus [*sic*] quoque mulierium ordinavimus quod oblatio quam mulier reconcilianda propria manu obtulerit proprie sacerdotis erit, preter candelam que remanebit in exclesia [*sic*] ad ministerium altaris, et universe quecumque oblate fuerint in ecclesia candele; oblationes autem sequentium mulierum sicut et alie inter monachos et sacerdotes per medium dividentur.
75. LaLore, *Cartulaire de Montier-la-Celle*, charter #232, pp. 276–84.
76. Pontal, *Les Statuts de Paris*, p. lxxi.
77. The character and implications of these abuses are explored in chapters 2 and 6. The concern at this point is only to use the statutes to establish when and where the ritual of purification was practiced in northern medieval France.
78. Thomas Gousset, ed., *Les Actes de la province ecclésiastiques de Reims* (Reims: L. Jacquet, 1843), 2:315–316. Ut nullus deinceps eorumdem canonicorum parochiae curam habeat, nec ab episcopo sub aliqua specie parochiam suscipiat, vel titulatam vel commendatam. Indignum enim valde est ut ille qui in majori ecclesia, secundum canonicam dignitatem sacro-sancto altari en ordine vicis suae est assignatus, parochiali curae teneatur obnoxius; alienum quippe est a canonica dignate conjugales thoros benedicere, enixas mulieres purificare, rixas populi et contentiones ad episcopum referre, decano presbytorum subesse, inter convicaneos et plebeios sacerdotes eum annumerari, qui ex dignitate sui officii adscriptus est in matricula ecclesiae juxta nomen magnorum qui sunt in ecclesia.
79. These liturgies are examined in chapter 4.
80. For Rouen, Guillaume Bessin, ed., *Concilia Rotomagensis provincia* (Rouen: Franciscum Vaultier, 1717), 2:46. For Paris, Francisi de Harlay, ed., *Synodicon ecclesiae Parisiensis* (Paris: F. Muguet, 1674), p. 20; also quoted in Pontal, *Les statuts de Paris*, p. 88. For Soissons, Odette Pontal, ed., *Les Statuts synodaux de l'ancienne province de Reims (Cambrai, Arras, Noyon, Soissons et Tournai)*, Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France 23 (Paris: CTHS, 1995), p. 294. For Cambrai, P.C. Boeren, ed., "Les Plus anciens statuts du diocèse de Cambrai," in *Revue de droit canonique* 3 (March 1953): 155. For Angers, Luc d'Achery, ed., *Spicilegium sive collectio veterum aliquot scriptorum* (Paris: Montalant, 1723–35), 1:727, also quoted in Joseph Avril, ed., *Les Statuts synodaux angevins de la seconde moitié du XIIIe siècle*, Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France 19 (Paris: CTHS, 1988), p. 78. For Liège, B.N. microfilm 2335, Synod of John of Flanders, cap. viii. For Noyon, B.N. lat. 11067, fols. 5v–6r, also quoted in Pontal, *Les Statuts de l'ancienne province*, p. 246. For Arras, Pontal, *Les Statuts de l'ancienne province*, p. 217.
81. For Bayeux, Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:238. For Troyes, Ch. Lalore, ed., *Ancienne discipline du diocèse de Troyes jusqu'en 1788* (Troyes: secrétariat de l'evêché,

1882), 2:108. For Chartres, Maurice Jusselin, ed., "Statuts synodaux et constitutions synodales du diocèse de Chartres au XIVe siècle (1355)" in *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* (January–March 1929), p. 105. For Sées, Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:436. For Meaux, Edmund Martène, ed., *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum* (Paris: Florentini Delaulne, 1717), 4:902.

82. For Reims, Edmund Martène, ed., *Veterum scriptorum et monumentorum historicorum dogmaticorum et moralium amplissima collectio* (Paris, 1733), 7:418, also in Gousset, *Les actes*, 2:662. For Coutances, Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:571. For Lisieux, Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:484. For Amiens, Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:706. For Tournai, Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:750–51.
83. The following list provides the date of the earliest surviving collection followed by the date of the earliest statute on churching. Amiens: 1411/1454; Angers: ca. 1220/1262; Arras: 1291/1292; Bayeux: ca. 1300/1370; Cambrai: 1238/thirteenth century; Chartres: 1325/1368; Liège: before 1287/1290; Meaux: ca. 1346/1364; Noyon: thirteenth century/1280–85; Paris: 1196–1208/1208; Rouen: 1224/1224; Sées: 1369/1369; Soissons: thirteenth century/thirteenth century.
84. Coutances: 1185–99/1481; Lisieux: before 1321/1452; Reims: before 1330/1408; Tournai: before 1341/1481; Troyes: 1207–23/1370.
85. Boeren, "Les Plus anciens statuts," 155.
86. B.M. Cambrai, *Manual for use of Cambrai*, 1503, fol. 24r. De mulieribus post partum purificandis quod non consuetum est in cameraco sed in aliis locis circumiacentibus secundum diversitatem locorum.
87. Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:46. . . .capellanus noster nullum de parrochianis eiusdem ad oblationes recipiet, nec ad poenitentiam, vel purificationem seu cetera quae parrochiani jure parrochiali debent a proprio percipere Sacerdote. Si vero contigerit uxorem nostram vel mulierem aliam in manerio nostro S. Albini partum suscipere, uxoris nostrae, vel mulieris purificatio, et baptismus pueri ad parrochiae presbyterum pertinebit. Confessiones et etiam poenitentiarum injunctiones, matrimonia, Viatici exhibitionem, et mortuorum sepulturas ad eumdem concedimus pertinere.
88. Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:241. Cum alias prohibuerimus nuptiales benedictionis fieri in capellis, repertumque sit postea plures factas fuisse, praeceptis et bannis in ecclesia non factis; et dignum sit ut inobedientes puniantur, et viae maleficiis praecludantur: omnes capellas nostrae Dioecesi quoad faciendum in eis benedictiones nuptiales et purificationem mulierem, quae de nostra Dioecesi existunt, ecclesiastico supponimus interdicto, nisi saltem unus rectorum maritati vel maritatae praesens fuerit, qui adhuc bannis factis, de expressa voluntate rectoris alterius litteratorie sit munitus.
89. Pontal, *Les Statuts synodaux de l'ancienne province*, p. 246. Nullus presbiter parrochianam aliam ad purificationem recipiat nisi fuerit parrochiana sua, vel de mandato vel de licentia proprii sacerdotis. Also in B.N. lat. 11067, fol. 6r.
90. Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:579, Synodal Statutes of Soissons published in 1334. XIX Praecept. Insuper volumus et ordinamus et districte praecipimus, quatenus curati et ecclesiarum rectores omnes, illos et illas qui et quae ad solemnisationem matrimonii, purificationem partus, aut alias sacramenta

ecclesiastica de caetero se recipi facient ad alio quam a curato suo, praecipue a monachis sancti Benedicti, Cluniacensis, et Praemonstratensis ordinum, auctoritate nostra denuntient et publicent excommunicatos et eisdem ingressum ecclesiae et ecclesiastica sacramenta denegent, nisi legitime constet tales praemissa facientes super his licentiam obtinere, de qua quidem licentia appareat per litteras debite confectas et sigillatas: insinuantes eisdem quod hujusmodi excommunicationis absolutio, nisi in articulo mortis, est nobis et non alteri reservata. The pointed reference to "Benedictines, Cluniacs and Premonstratensians" in this legislation reflects the long-standing argument over jurisdiction between bishops and members of religious communities, which became especially heated with the founding of the mendicant orders. For the history of this controversy, see Lemarignier, *Institutions ecclésiastiques*, pp. 237–38 and 362–68; Jean Gaudemet, *Église et cité: Histoire du droit canonique* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1994), pp. 448–51; Gabriel Le Bras, *Institutions ecclésiastiques de la Chrétienté médiévale*, première partie, Histoire de l'Église depuis les origines jusqu'á nos jours 12 (Tournai: Bloud & Gay, 1964), pp. 540–63. For the effects of this conflict on parish life, see Michel Aubrun, *La Paroisse en France des origines au XVe siècle* (Paris: Picard, 1986), pp. 122–25.

91. In 1326, the wife of Luc de Castereyo brought herself before the *officialité* of the Abbey of Cerisy in Normandy where she was a parishioner. Madam Castereyo had been churched outside the jurisdiction of the Abbey and so had been excommunicated by the bishop of Bayeux. The record does not indicate any irregularity about Madam Castereyo's pregnancy and birth. Her only offense seems to have been her decision to be churched at someplace other than her parish. See *Registre de l'officialité de l'abbaye de Cerisy*, ed. Gustave Dupont (Caen: Le Blanc, 1880), p. 105, Record 130c. Uxor Luce de Castereyo nobis gagiavit emendam ad nostram voluntatem pro eo quod extra jurisdicionem nostram se fecit purificari et erat excommunicata auctoritate officialis Baiocensis, faciendo prejudicium ecclesie cerasiensi cum sit nostra parrochiana.
92. B.N. lat. 11067, fols. 5v–6r and Pontal, *Les Statuts de l'ancienne province*, p. 246. Pervenit ad nos quod quidam presbiteri nostre diocesis. . .ad exactiones impias se convertunt pro pastibus quod tam a nubentium quam a reconciliatis mulieribus recipere eisdem de conseutudine est permissum ultra quam debeat extorquentur. Eorum igitur cupiditati et avaritie obviare volentes, statuimus ut presbiteri celebratis benedictionibus nubentium tribus solidus, celebratis reconciliationibus mulierum duodecim denariis de cetero sint contenti. This statute provides an unusual example of a tariff system. According to Pontal, *Les Statuts de l'ancienne province*, p. 246, n. 58, these systems existed but texts such as this are rare. Because this is the only example of such a fee for churching with which I am familiar, it is difficult to know whether the amount set in this statute was typical.
93. For Cambrai, Boeren, "Les Plus anciens statuts," 155; for Angers, Avril, *Les Statuts synodaux angevins*, p. 96; for Liège, B.N. microfilm 2335, c. 8.
94. On the income of parish clergy, see Aubrun, *La Paroisse*, pp. 126–33.

95. Gousset, *Les Actes*, p. 493 and B.N. lat. 1591, fol. 17r. Statuimus. . .quodque sacerdotes mulieres non purificent, praeterquam in mortis articulo, nisi jacuerint per mensem post nativitatem sui partus. This is the only statute I have found directing churching to be used in this way.
96. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:212–13, 229–30, and 239–40. Cressy, "Purification and Thanksgiving," p. 109; Coster, "Purity and Profanity," p. 377; Rushton, "Purification or Social Control," pp. 119–21; Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth," pp. 84–86.
97. Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Coffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), pp. 20–21 and 46–47.
98. Margaret Mead, *From the South Seas: Studies of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies* (New York: William Morrow, 1939), pp. 36–37 and 321–23.
99. For example, see Bronislaw Malinowski, *The Sexual Lives of Savages in North-Western Melanesia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1929), pp. 232–33; Barbara L.K. Pillsbury, " 'Doing the Month': Confinement and Convalescence of Chinese Women after Childbirth," in *Anthropology of Human Birth*, ed. Margarite Artschwager Kay (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1982), pp. 119–46; Sally Price, *Co-Wives and Calabashes*, second edition (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993), pp. 21–24.
100. Mead, *From the South Seas*, p. 36.
101. Cressy, "Purification, Thanksgiving and Churching," pp. 108–10.
102. Though she situates women's agency in the twelfth century rather than in the earlier period, Becky Lee makes a similar point in her article, "The Purification of Women after Childbirth: A Window onto Medieval Perceptions of Women," *Florilegium* 14 (1995–96): 48–50.

Chapter 2 *Ob Honorem Sacramenti Matrimonii*

1. Michel Toussaints du Plessis, ed., *Histoire de l'église de Meaux* (Paris: Julien-Michel Gandoin et Pierre-François Giffart, 1731) 2:540–41. Proinde nos subinductam dudum ob honorem Sacramenti Matrimonii et ut id prolem esse legitimam manifestet, in nostra Diocesi hactenus observatam consuetudinem, qua mulieres quae post earum de legitimo matrimonio partum abstinuerint, ut praefertur, evolutis certis diebus ad Ecclesiam pergentes a parrochiali Presbytero, cum aspersione aquae exorcizatae, introducuntur, et ibi panis eisdem porrigitur benedictus: aliis autem quae non ex legitimo matrimonio, sed de incestuoso vel alias adulterino ac fornicario concubitu conceperunt et enixae sunt, sive similiter abstinuerint sive non, solennitas huiusmodi in dictorum criminum execrationem denegatur, non esse juri dissonam reputantes, eandemque consuetudinem quantum opus est approbantes, omnibus et singulis nobis subditis districte praecipimus parrochialibus Presbyteris, quatinus nulli mulieri post et ob emissam prolem, nisi aliud canonicum impedimentum obstiterit, ingressum Ecclesiae denegantes; sed juxta supradictam consuetudinem illas duntaxat quae de legitimo matrimonio conceperint et pepererint, ad purificationem cum praetacta solennitate. Si fuerint requisiti, in suis recipiant et admittant Ecclesiis.

2. Odette Pontal, *Les Statuts de 1230 à 1260*, Collection de documents inedits sur l'histoire de France 15 (Paris: CTHS, 1983), p. 134. Precipimus puniri sacerdotes qui sacerdotum focarias suorum sociorum vel etiam alias adulteras, seu focarias purificent sine licentia nostra, vel archidiaconi loci vel penitentiarorum existentium Rotomagi.
3. On the lifestyle and customs of the Norman clergy in the thirteenth century, see Nadine-Josette Chaline, ed., *Le Diocèse de Rouen-Le Havre*, Histoire des diocèses de France 5 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), pp. 41–47.
4. For the reformers' tendency to refer to priests' wives in derogatory terms, see Anne Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy: The Eleventh-Century Debates* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), pp. 59–62 and 77–104.
5. See Lamarignier, *Institutions ecclésiastiques*, p. 264.
6. I use the term "improperly married" to describe women whose sexual relationships were not considered licit by ecclesiastical authority. These included clandestine marriages, which were valid but not licit, and the practice of concubinage, an ambiguous situation that the church opposed as immoral but nevertheless tolerated among the laity until the very late Middle Ages. The church condemned clerical concubinage much earlier and made consistent efforts to eradicate it from the eleventh century.
7. Avril, *Les Statuts synodaux angevins*, p. 102. Qualiter mulieres ad purifica tionem sunt admittende. Intelleximus quod nonnulle mulieres, maritorum suorum exigente contumacia, ecclesiastico interdictio supposite, necnon plures ex fornicario coitu, seu de adulterio, aut alio illicito parientes, et purificatione post partum indigentes latenter seu clandestine ecclesias ingrediuntur, postquam sacerdotes missarum solempnia inceperint, se facientes a dictis improvisi sacerdotibus purificari. Propter quod statuimus et prohibemus ne qua mulier ad missam seu purificacionem admittatur post partum, nisi per certum nuncium vel saltem in mane diu antequam pulsetur ad missam, vel die precedenti denunciari fecerit sacerdoti de velle venire ad purificacionem, ut sic deliberacione habita a sacerdotibus, admittendas admittant et repellandas repellant, et hec denuncient sacerdotes parrochianis suis diebus dominicis et festivis in ecclesiis suis in synodo sibi esse injuncta.
8. Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:493. Prohibemus ne sacerdotes, seu capellani, aut vicarii eorumdem, mulieres jacentes de partu damno, coitu nefario vel fornicatio et manifesto, ad purificationem recipiant, sine nostra vel officialis nostri Cameracensis, aut decanorum locorum civitatis Cameracensis, recepta licentia speciali. Qui contra hoc facere praesumpserit, excommunicationis sententiam, eo ipso, incurrat, et nihilominus per officialem nostrum, aut decanum loci, graviter, prout culpa ipsius exegerit, puniatur.
9. B.N. lat. 1591, fol. 40r. Item prohibemus ne sacerdotes capellanam seu vicarii muleres [*sic*] non uxoratas iacentes de partum dampnato aut coitu nephario vel fornicario procreato sine nostra aut officialis nostri vel de canonorum nostrorum licentia speciali ad purificationem recipiant.
10. Sées in 1369 and 1444 (Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:436); Bayeux in 1370 (Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:238); Tournai in 1481 (Gousset, *Les actes*, 2:750–51); Rouen in 1484 (*Statuta Rhotomagensis diocèses*, Rouen, 1484); Meaux in 1493 (see n. 1 above).

11. Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:238. Cum frequentissime, de quo dolendum est, in ista Diocesi sit repertum coitus incestuosos committi: statuimus ut si dictus incestus sit publico, vel in loco aliquo divulgatus, suspensionis et excommunicationis poenis prius muliere ad purifactionem nullatenus admittendam.
12. The church defined incest very broadly as intercourse between blood kin within four degrees of relationship. Sexual relations between persons with a spiritual affinity, as when both partners were godparents for the same child, was also defined as incest.
13. Tournai (2481): Gousset, *Les actes*, 2:750. Item, inhibemus decanis nostris, curatis et vice-curatis, caeterisque presbyteris et religiosis nostrae diocesis, ne mulieres, quae in incestu stupro, aut de presbyteris, vel religiosis conceperunt; nec etiam moniales, hospitalarias, beghinam et alias religiosas ad purificationem, seu reconciliationem post partum recipere, seu purificare praesumant, absque nostra aut curiae nostrae Tornacensis licentia speciali.
14. On beguines, see Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture, with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954); Bernard Delmaire, "Les beguines dans le Nord de la France au première siècle de leur histoire (vers 1230–vers 1350)," in *Les Religieuses en France au XIIIe siècle*, ed. Michel Parisse (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), pp. 121–62; Carol Neel, "The Origins of the Beguines," in *Sisters and Workers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Judith Bennett, Elizabeth A. Clark, Jean F. O'Barr, B. Anne Vilen, and Sarah Westphal-Wihl (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 240–60; Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* (NotreDame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Juliette Dor, *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and Their Impact* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999); Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).
15. Guibert of Tournai, *Collectio de scandalis ecclesiae*, in *Beiträge zur politischen, kirchlichen und Culturgeschichte*, ed. Ignaz von Döllinger (Regensburg: G.J. Manz, 1862–82), 3:197.
16. Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:662. Also in Martène, *Veterum scriptorum*, 7:418. [In a subsection entitled by the editor: Concernant la visite des paroisses.] XXIV. Item, si per negligentiam suam aliqui pereunt sine sacramentis, ut pueri vel aegroti. Si mulieres habentes pueros ex concubinatu admittit solemniter ad purificationem.
17. Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:484. Praecipimus etiam omnibus Presbyteris nobis subditis, quod si sciverint aliquos Parochianos habentes penes se publice concubinas, hoc Promotori nostro denuntient: nec concubinas huiusmodi recipiant ad purificationem absque litteris nostris emanatis, sub poena gravi.
18. For Amiens, Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:744. Item, inhibemus omnibus et singulis presbyteris nobis subditis, ne absque licentia et mandato expresse a nobis obtendo, concubinas aliquas purificent, seu ad purificationem admittant. For Coutances, Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:571. De eisdem: Praecipimus etiam omnibus Presbyteriis nobis subditis quod si sciverint aliquos parochianos

suos habentes penes se publice concubinas, hoc Promotoribus nostris denuntient; nec concubinas huiusmodi recipiant ad purificationem absque litteris a Nobis, aut officiariis nostris emanatis, sub poena gravi. For Meaux, see n. 1 above.

19. James Brundage, *Medieval Canon Law* (London: Longman, 1995), p. 47. On Gratian himself, see John T. Noonan, "Gratian Slept Here: The Changing Identity of the Father of Systematic Canon Law," *Traditio* 35 (1979): 145–72.
20. Ivo of Chartres, *Decretum* 8.88, *PL* 161:601–602.
21. Ivo of Chartres, *De poenitentia* 15:151, *PL* 161:891–92.
22. Gratian, *Decretum* 1.5.1–4, in *Corpus iuris canonici*, ed. Emil Friedberg (Graz: Akademische Druck-u. Verlagsanstalt, 1959), 1:7–9.
23. See Augustine Thompson, O.P., trans., *Gratian, The Treatise on Laws (Decretum DD. 1–20) with the Ordinary Gloss*, Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law 2 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), pp. xxii–xxiii.
24. See above for Gregory's words regarding women entering church after giving birth.
25. For a discussion of Gratian's role in changing ideas about purification, see Lee, "The Purification of Women after Childbirth," 45.
26. On the first manuals, see Payer, "Confession and the Study of Sex," p. 9 and n. 35.
27. Thomas of Chobham, *Summa confessorum* 7.2.2a.3, Analecta Mediaevalia Namurcensis 25, ed. F. Broomfield (Louvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1968), p. 338. Verumtamen sciendum est quod si vir petat debitum ab uxore sua puerpera et ipsa timeat se lapsu viri, consilium est ut statim accedat ad purificationem et statim reddat debitum, quia dicit canon: *si mulier eadem hora qua genuerit ecclesiam introeat gratias actura, nullo pondere peccati gravatur.*
28. Chobham, *Summa confessorum* 7.2.10a, Broomfield, p. 366.
29. John of Fribourg, *Summa confessorum* 3.2.15 (Augsburg, 1476); John of Erfurt, *Summa confessorum* 1.8.1, ed. Norbert Brieskorn (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1980), 1:702–703; Astesanus of Asti, *Summa de casibus conscientiae* 8.10 (Lyon, 1519); William of Auvergne, *De poenitentia*, 2.1.3, ed. B. Le Féron (Paris: J. Lacaille, 1674), p. 526; Anthony of Florence, *Summula confessionis, Defecerunt*, 3.49 (Strasbourg, 1499).
30. Raymond of Peñafort, *Summa de poenitentia et matrimonio cum glossis Joannis de Friburgo* [that is, the gloss of William of Rennes not John of Fribourg], 4.2, gloss k (Rome: J. Tallini, 1603), p. 516. On William of Rennes, see Michel-Quantin, *Sommes de casuistique*, p. 41.
31. John of Fribourg, *Summa confessorum* 3.2.15, Quid si vir cognoscit uxorem post partum ante purificationem. Numquid est morale peccatem. Respondo secundum glossa ibidem. . . .Sed qui reddit his temporibo non peccat. Hic in glossa. Nota etiam quod ut dicitur extra de purificatione post partum. Si mulieres post partum intrare volunt ecclesiam ad agendum gratias non peccant nec sunt prohibende. Si tamen ex veneratione voluerint aliquam diu abstinere devotio earum non est improbanda. Dicit tamen glossa super.c. Ad

eius quod si tempore purgationis mulier petat debitum a viro non reddet ei nisi timeretur eius fornicatio.

32. See Dyan Elliott, "Bernardino of Siena versus the Marriage Debt," in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), pp. 169–74.
33. I.C. Lecompte, ed., "*Richeut*, Old French Poem of the Twelfth Century, with Introduction, Notes and Glossary," *The Romanic Review* 4.3 (July–September 1913): 261–305.

    Richeut s'acesme au merëor,
    A messe en vait.
    Mantel a ver, grant coe trait.
    N'i a lechëor ne agait,
    Tuit ont mervoille;
    L'uns a l'autre dit et consoille
    O el prant de don s'aparoile:
    "Lo vis a bel,
    O prist ele si bon mantel,
    Et cel chainse ridé novel
    Qui si traïne?". . .
    S'ofrande fait et la messe ot,
    Puis s'en repaire a Herselot
    Lo pas arriere;
    Grant coe trait par la podriere.

34. There is a large literature on this. See Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Conflict: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), pp. 1–27 and especially her bibliography on p. 24. For the effect of the reforms on ecclesiastical institutions, see Lemarignier, *Institutions ecclésiastiques*, pp. 78–139.
35. On the reform of clerical marriage, see Michael Frassetto, ed., *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (New York: Garland, 1998), which includes a very helpful historiography on this topic by Edward Peters in his article, "History, Historians, and Clerical Celibacy," pp. 3–21. Also, see Barstow, *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy*; C.N.L. Brooke, "Gregorian Reform in Action: Clerical Marriage in England, 1050–1200," in *Medieval Church and Society*, ed. C.N.L. Brooke (New York: New York University Press, 1972), pp. 69–99; Collin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 79–108.
36. Barstow is particularly useful for describing the sometimes vituperative language of the reformers. See *Married Priests and the Reforming Papacy*, pp. 77–104. For a discussion of this language and its impact on women, see Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, pp. 98–104.
37. On Gregory's role in promoting clerical celibacy, see H.E.J. Cowdrey, "Pope Gregory VII and the Chastity of the Clergy" in Frassetto, *Medieval Purity and Piety*, pp. 269–302.

38. Georges Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: Univesity of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 81.
39. See Blumenthal, *The Investiture Conflict*, pp. 113–27.
40. See Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Pantheon Press, 1983), pp. 107–20 for a discussion of several heresies particular to northern France.
41. See R.I. Moore, *The Origins of European Dissent* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985). Moore explores the heretical individuals and groups who espoused celibacy in eleventh-century France to determine the meaning and theoretical basis for their rejection of marriage; also, Michael Frassetto, "Heresy, Celibacy, and Reform in the Sermons of Ademar of Chabannes," in Frassetto, *Medieval Purity and Piety*, pp. 131–48.
42. On Catharism, see LeRoy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village, 1294–1324*, trans. Barbara Bray (London: Scolar, 1978); Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*, second edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 44–61; Moore, *Origins of European Dissent*, pp. 168–240; Carol Lansing, *Power and Purity: Cathar Heresy in Medieval Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
43. General works on marriage include Georges Duby, *Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, trans. Jane Dunnett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Christopher N.L. Brooke, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); David Herlihy, *Medieval Households* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); Le Bras, "Le Mariage dans la théologie et le droit l'Église," and also "La Doctrine du mariage," DTC 9:2123–2317, esp. 2123–2224; Jean Dauvillier, *Le Mariage dans le droit classique de l'Église depuis le Décrat de Gratien jusqu'à la mort de Clement V* (Paris: Recueil Sirey, 1933).
44. On early medieval marriage in France, see Suzanne Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500 to 900* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985) and "Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Early Medieval Women," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Blumenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, second edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 131–51; Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, *Il matrimonio nella società altomedievale*, Settimano di studio del centro italiano di Studi sull'alto Medioevo 24 (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro, 1977).
45. Georges Duby argued for distinct lay and ecclesiastical models of marriage in *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elborg Forster (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). He modified and developed this thesis in *The Knight, the Lady and the Priest*. David Herlihy has questioned the reality of distinct models while admitting that there were disputes between clerical ideals and aristocratic behavior regarding marriage; see Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, p. 86.
46. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 87 and Philippe Ariès, "The Indissoluble Marriage," in *Western Sexuality: Practice and Perception in Past*

and Present Times, ed. Philippe Ariès and André Béjin, trans. Anthony Forster (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 140–57.

47. One result of the theory of free consent was the problem of clandestine marriages, which now could be both valid and binding. Not only did these marriages contravene the proper role of the family, they also posed problems because of the lack of witnesses, especially in terms of property settlements and in cases where the legality of the marriage was later contested. On free consent, see Charles Donahue, "The Canon Law on the Formation of Marriage and Social Practice in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Family History* 8.2 (1983): 144–58; Michael M. Sheehan, "Choice of Marriage Partner in the Middle Ages: Development and Mode of Application of a Theory of Marriage," in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, n. s. 1, ed. J.A.S. Evans and R.W. Unger (New York: AMS Press, 1978), pp. 3–33; John T. Noonan, "Power to Choose," *Viator* 4 (1973): 419–34. On clandestine marriage, see Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, especially pp. 239, 335–36, 361–64, and 440–43; Andrew J. Finch, "Parental Authority and the Problem of Clandestine Marriage in the Later Middle Ages," *Law and History Review* 8 (1990): 189–204 and the reply to this argument by Charles Donahue, " 'Clandestine' Marriage in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply," *Law and History Review* 10 (1992): 315–22; Beatrice Gottlieb, "The Meaning of Clandestine Marriage," in *Family and Sexuality in French History*, ed. Robert Wheaton and Tamara K. Hareven (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980), pp. 49–83; Zacharias P. Thundy, "Medieval Clandestine Marriages in *Aucassin et Nicolette*," *Medieval Perspectives* 3.2 (1991): 148–59.
48. C.N.L. Brooke has suggested that the need for a public space in which to celebrate marriages resulted in the architectural development of church porches, many of which were added during this period. See Brooke, *Medieval Ideal of Marriage*, pp. 253–54. I think it is probable that these porches also provided a space for the rite *Ad introducendam* described in chapter 4. By the early thirteenth century, the public celebration of marriage in northern France also included the proper reading of banns. This practice was meant to provide ample opportunity for anyone to come forward with evidence that the marriage would be invalid for some reason, such as proof that the couple were being forced into the marriage or were related within the forbidden degrees of kinship. See Sheehan, "Choice of Marriage Partner," p. 15.
49. Concubinage, understood as a long-term, monogamous sexual relationship established informally between a man and a woman, posed a particularly difficult problem for the canon lawyers. See Brundage, *Sex, Law and Christian Society*, pp. 206–207. On concubinage, see Margaret Ross, "Concubinage in Anglo-Saxon England," *Past & Present* 108 (1985): 3–34. There is no doubt that such informal unions were made and just as informally unmade, regardless of the church's teaching to the contrary. Among the laity, the belief that concubinage was acceptable persisted throughout the Middle Ages. C.N.L. Brooke argued that the letters of Heloise, written

in the early twelfth century, reveal a respect for concubines whose love is pure and selfless as opposed to the obligatory and purchased love of wives. See *Medieval Idea of Marriage*, pp. 114–115. The practice was especially common among the poor and lower classes for whom the formalities of marriage might prove difficult or impossible. See Michael Sheehan, "Theory and Practice: Marriage of the Unfree and the Poor in Medieval Society," *Medieval Studies* 50 (1988): 482–83.

50. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 241–42.
51. On the approaches of different theologians and canon lawyers to the questions of marital relations and sin, see Elizabeth M. Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law," in *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Julia Bolton Holloway, Constance S. Wright, and Joan Bechtold (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 129–43. On the anxiety produced by these debates, see Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 69–76.
52. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 282–83.
53. Hugh of Saint-Victor, *De parentelae gradibus*, *PL* 176:193–94, translated in Jean Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage: A Twelfth-Century View* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), p. 26.
54. The issue that generated this was whether consent or consummation created a marriage. This was contested hotly by churchmen in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Gratian argued for both consent and consummation. Hugh of Saint-Victor and Peter Lombard argued for consent alone. The consensual theory finally won the day. This was stated in its fullest form by Pope Alexander III (1159–81). See Charles Donahue, "The Policy of Alexander III's Consent Theory of Marriage," in *Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of Canon Law* (Vatican: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1976), pp. 251–81; for the influence of the marriage of the Virgin Mary and Joseph on this debate, Penny Gold, "The Marriage of Mary and Joseph in the Twelfth-Century Ideology of Marriage," in *Sexual Practices and the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern Bullough and James A. Brundage (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1982), pp. 102–117.
55. On this idea, see Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, especially chapter four.
56. Marc Glasser believes that this was the turning point in the argument over whether marriage was or was not a sacrament. See his article "Marriage in Medieval Hagiography," in *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, ed. J.A.S. Evans and R.W. Unger, n.s. 4 (1981), p. 20. On marriage as a sacrament, see Gabriel Le Bras, "La Doctrine du mariage chez les théologiens et les canonistes depuis l'an mille," DTC, 9:2196–2201 and on the Lombard's theology of marriage, 9:2151–54; on controversy over the sacramentality of marriage, see Brundage, *Sex, Law and Christian Society*, pp. 431–32.
57. Le Bras, "La Doctrine du mariage," DTC, 9:2177–79. On Domincan views of marriage, see Fabian Parmisano, "Love and Marriage in the Middle Ages," *New Blackfriars* 50 (1969): 599–608 and 649–60.
58. Sheehan, "Choice of Marriage Partner," pp. 20–25.

59. See Avril, *Les Statuts synoduax angevins*, pp. 29–31.
60. Frederik Pedersen, "Did the Medieval Laity Know the Canon Law Rules on Marriage? Some Evidence from Fourteenth-Century York Cause Papers," *Mediaeval Studies* 56 (1994): 147; Rüdiger Schnell, "The Discourse on Marriage in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 73 (1998): 771–86. Also, see David d'Avray, "The Gospel of the Marriage Feast of Cana and Marriage Preaching in France," in *The Bible in the Medieval World: Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley*, Studies in Church History, Subsidia 4, ed. Katherine Walsh and Diana Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 207–24; D'Avray and Tausche, "Marriage Sermons in *Ad status* Collections," 77–109.
61. Bernard of Clairvaux, sermon 66, in *Sermones super cantica canticorum*, ed. Jean Leclercq, C.H. Talbot, and H.M. Rochais (Rome: Éditiones Cisterciennes, 1957–58), 2:178. Also, see Le Bras, "La Doctrine du mariage," DTC 9:2173–74. On Bernard's preaching against heretics, see Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage*, p. 79 and John Sommerfeldt, "Bernard of Clairvaux on Love and Marriage," *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 30.2 (1995): 141–46.
62. James of Vitry, *Sermones in epistolas et evangelia* (Antwerp, 1575), p. 156. Tertium ut debitum carnis suae utriusque consensu sibi non substrahant. Unde Apostolus: Uxori vir debitum reddat, similiter et uxor viro: mulier sui corporis potestatem non habet, sed vir: et vir potestatem sui corporis non habet, sed mulier.
63. Sheehan, "Theory and Practice," 111–52.
64. Sheehan, "Choice of Marriage Partner," pp. 27–32. Also, Jean-Baptiste Molin and Protais Mutembe, *Le Rituel du mariage en France di XIIe au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1974), pp. 29–32 and 103–104.
65. The idea that fornication was not sinful was so prominent that the church took the step of declaring this opinion heretical in 1277. See Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 459.
66. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 459–60.
67. See p. 41 and n. 7 above. It is worth noting that the wording of this statute blames the women for their husbands' unwillingness to submit to church discipline.
68. Gousset, *Les actes*, 2:635. . . .dicatur ei publice in ecclesia a sacerdote, quod si sacramenta ecclesiae petierit, nequaquam ei conferentur, nec uxor ejus cum partu surrexerit ad purificationem admittetur, et ita ei denegentur sacramenta ecclesiastica, donec fecerit supradicta.
69. On excommunication, see Elisabeth Vodola, *Excommunication in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986). On late medieval regulations concerning contumacious sinners, see especially p. 62 and on the position of wives forced to live with contumacious excommunicates, p. 64.
70. Vodola, *Excommunication*, pp. 41–42.
71. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 269–72; R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (London: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 66–99.
72. Boswell, *Christianity and Social Tolerance*, pp. 3–15.

73. Moore, *Formation of a Persecuting Society*, pp. 2–3.
74. Georges Duby explored this power shift in his book *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest*; see especially chapter 10.
75. *Manual for use of Sens* (Paris, 1500).
76. B.M. Cambrai, ms. 236, fol. 22r and the *Manual for use of Cambrai* (1503), fol. 24r.
77. Du Cange, *Glossarium* 5:364.
78. On the regularization of informal marriages, see Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 369, 447, and 515; Sheehan, "Theory and Practice," 485–87.
79. E.G. Cuthbert Atchley, "Notes on the Beginning and Growth of the Usage of a Second Gospel at Mass," *Transactions of the St. Paul Ecclesiological Society* 4 (1900): 162; Josef Jungman, *Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, trans. Francis Brunner (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1949), 1:221–24.
80. For Reims, see B.N. lat. 11067, fols. 17r–17v; for Amiens, see Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:707–708.
81. Avril, *Les Statuts synodaux angevins*, p. 161; also Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:453. Item precipimus quod nullus presbyter aliquam mulierem in die, qua inter ipsam et virum matrimonium fuerit celebratum et solemnisatum, ad purificationem seu messationem admittere presumat, nisi de nostra aut officialis nostri licentia speciali.
82. Praesta quos omnipotens et misericors deus ut hec nova nupta mente et corpore pariter purificata et mundata, sic tibi famuletur in terris que inter sanctos et electos tuos collocetur in celum. Per.
83. Benedicere (+) et sanctificare (+) digneris domine hunc novam nuptam et omnes circumstantes tua benedictione celesti. In nomine patris et filii et. . .amen.
84. Molin and Mutembe, *Le Rituel du mariage*, pp. 199–200.
85. "Lord, bless this creature of bread, etc." See, for example, Molin and Mutembe, ordo XIII (fourteenth century, Paris), p. 303; ordo XIV (fourteenth century, Rouen), p. 305; ordo XV (fourteenth century, diocese of Sens), pp. 307–308.
86. Molin and Mutembe, *Le Rituel du mariage*, p. 199.
87. Molin and Mutembe, *Le Rituel du mariage*, pp. 239–40.
88. Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:706. On the nuptial blessing, see Kenneth Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites* (London: Alcuin Club/SPCK, 1982) and " 'Benedictio nuptialis.' Reflections on the Blessing of Bride and Groom in some Western Mediaeval Rites," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 93.6 (1979): 457–78; Molin and Mutembre, *Le Rituel du mariage*, pp. 223–38, especially pp. 236–37.
89. For a translation of the nuptial blessing found in both Cambrai texts, see Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, pp. 245–46. Note, however, that the Cambrai texts do not use the plural form at the end of the blessing but address the entire prayer solely to the bride.
90. Stevenson, *Nuptial Blessing*, p. 246.

Chapter 3 *Quia Pollutae et Peccatrices Erant*

1. Hugh of Saint-Victor, *De beatae Mariae virginitate, PL* 176.872. Merito namque in partu corrupta est integritas, quia in conceptu virginitas polluta est, justumque erat, ut non pareretur sine dolore, quod conceptum non erat sine libidine. Nequaquam partus dolorem afferret, si conceptus non sensisset libidinem. Quia si culpa delectationis illicitae concipientem non pollueret, nunquam poena doloris parientem cruciaret. Amadeus of Lausanne made the same argument in a sermon on the virgin birth; see *Magnificat: Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, trans. Marie-Bernard Saïd and Grace Perogi (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), p. 88.
2. Peter Abelard, Sermon 5, on the Purification, *PL* 178:419: . . .more feminarum mater ejus purificationem observavit legalem, in qua nihil purificandum fuerat purgandum. Quae enim virgo de Spiritu sancto concepit et peperit, nihil legi debebat in ritu purificationis.. . .Qui profecto ritus in lege sancitus [*sic*], cum his tantum mulieribus injungatur, quae suscepto viri semine pepererunt, patenter ostenditur, nequaquam subjacere huic legu, quae virgo concepit et peperit.
3. For example, the ninth-century works *De eo quod Christus ex virgine natus est* by Ratramnus, *PL* 121:81–102 and *De partu virginis* of Paschius Radbertus, *PL* 120:1367–86, which commented on churching in the context of defending Mary's virginity. Radbertus's treatise, written to counter a heresy which claimed that the birth of Christ must have followed the normal process of childbirth and, consequently, brought about the loss of Mary's virginity, is particularly rich in its references to the experiences of ordinary women. In addition to these earlier works, chapters 2 and 3 in Hugh of Saint-Victor's *De beatae Mariae virginitate*, written in the twelfth century, *PL* 176:870–87, and Thomas Aquinas's thirteenth-century treatment of Mary's virginity after the birth of Christ, *Summa theologica* 3.28.2, ed. R.P. Joannis Nicolai (New York: Musurgia, 1948), 4:125–26, are valuable for exploring clerical notions of churching. These works were influential in their own day and remained part of the theological corpus during the central and later Middle Ages.
4. Bernard's sermon is in B.N. fr. 24768, fols. 104r–106r, dated to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century; see Zink, *La Prédication*, p. 69. Maurice's sermon has been edited in *Maurice of Sully and the Medieval Vernacular Homily with the text of Maurice's French Homilies from a Sens Cathedral Chapter ms.*, ed. C.A. Robson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952), pp. 177–79.
5. B.N. fr. 409, fols. 16r–17v. (My thanks to Mme. Geneviève Hasenohr for this reference.)
6. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones*, ed. Jean Leclercq and H. Rochais (Rome: Éditiones Cisterciennes, 1966), pp. 341–44.
7. B.N. fr. 24768, fol. 104r. En la loy estoit escrit ke li femme ki receut avoit la semence et kenfanteit avoit un fil fust set iors manant natte et a loctave ior circoncesist son enfant et des lors en avant fust entendue a lei a purifier et a lavier et si se tenust trente trois iors ke le nen intrest le temple. . .(My thanks to Karen Fresco and Virginie Green for help with this passage.) The Latin

text in Bernard, *Sermones*, ed. Leclercq and Rochais, 4:341, reads: In Lege enim scriptum erat, ut mulier quae, suscepto semine, peperisset filium, immunda septem diebus, octava die circumcideret puerum, dehinc, ablutioni et purificatione intenta, abstineret ab ingressu templi triginta tribus diebus. . .

8. Maurice, *French Homilies*, ed. Robson, p. 178. La Purification l'apelons nos, por ço que Nostre Dame sainte Marie acompli sa gesine a cest jor ausi com une autre fame, ne mie por ço qu'ele eüst mestier de gesine com autre femme, ne de baignier ne d'espurgement, mais por ce jut des le Nativité Nostre Segnor jusqu'a ore, qu'ele vaut tenir la costume as autres femmes. . .The word *gesine* comes from the verb *gesir*, to lie helplessly. I have translated it here as "lying-in" although in other contexts it can also refer to the celebration surrounding a woman's purification. See the discussion of the word in the Introduction, p. 10.
9. B.N. fr. 409, fol. 16r. la purification lapelons nous por ce que nostre dame saint marie acompli sa gesine a ceul ior comme autre fame. Non mie porce quelle eust mestier de gesine que autre fame ne de baignier ne despurgier mes porce vit de la nativite nostre seignor desque a ore quelle vost tenir la coustume des autres fames.
10. For canons on washing after intercourse, see *Penitential of Theodore* 2.12.29 in Schmitz, *Die Bussbücher* 1:547, *Canones Gregorii* 182 in Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 179, and the Hubertense penitential c. 57, Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, p. 385; also, Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 163.
11. Karant-Nunn understands churching as a purification from diabolical influences. This is not an idea that appears in any of the French sermons or treatises that I examined. See Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, especially p. 85.
12. See chapter 1, p. 14.
13. See pp. 17–19.
14. William Durand, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 1.6.40. *CCCM* 140 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1995), p. 80. For an exploration of this passage, see Charles de Miramon, "Déconstruction et reconstruction du tabou de la femme menstruée (XIIe–XIIIe siècle)," in *Kontinuitaten und Zasuren in der Europaischen Rechtsgeschichte: Europaisches Forum Junger Rechtshistorikerinnen und Rechtshistoriker, Munchen 22–24* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1998), pp. 84–86.
15. It seems clear that similar beliefs about the differences between men's blood and women's blood circulated outside the clerical milieu. Peggy McCracken has recently examined the ways that blood was represented in medieval romance literature. She finds, for example, that men's blood was tied to heroic deeds and maintaining social order whereas women's blood was kept hidden and had no lasting impact on society. See *The Curse of Eve, the Wound of the Hero: Blood, Gender, and Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), especially pp. 6–20 and 55–58.
16. Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexualité et savoir médical au moyen âge* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), pp. 102–106. Also,

see Vern Bullough, "Medieval Medical Views of Women," *Viator* 4 (1973): 485–501. For the problems that medieval theologians had reconciling beliefs about menstruation and the sin of Eve with Mary's role as mother of Christ, see Charles Wood, "The Doctors' Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought," *Speculum* 56.4 (1981): 710–27.

17. Helen Rodnite Lemay, ed. and trans., *Women's Secrets: A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus's* De secretis mulierum *with Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 60 and 130–31. Talmudic writings from the sixth and seventh centuries also contained the idea that intercourse with a menstruating woman was dangerous to men and to any child conceived at that time. For the Talmudic tradition, see Neusner, *Idea of Purity*, pp. 95 and 98–99. Jean-Louis Flandrin suggests, however, that this notion was a Christian invention in *Un Temps pour embrasser*, p. 75. James Brundage, quoting Flandrin, says the same in *Law, Sex and Christian Society*, p. 156.
18. Lemay, *Women's Secrets*, p. 130.
19. Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexualité*, p. 104.
20. On medieval medicine, see Nancy Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990) and Shiela Campbell, Bert Hall, and David Klausner, eds., *Health, Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture* (New York: St. Martin, 1992). For an excellent brief survey, see Katherine Park, "Medicine and Society in Medieval Europe, 500–1500," in *Medicine in Society*, ed. Andrew Wear (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 59–90. On medical practitioners in France, see Danielle Jacquart, *Le Milieu médical en France du XIIe au XVe siècle* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1981). On women's medical practice and women's medicine, see Monica Green, ed. and trans., *The Trotula: A Compendium of Women's Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval West: Texts and Contexts*, Variorum Collected Studies Series CS680 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); and "Documenting Medieval Women's Medical Practice," in *Practical Medicine from Salerno to the Black Death*, ed. Luis García-Ballester (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 322–52. On the theory of humors, see Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, pp. 104–106.
21. Wood, "Doctor's Dilemma," 724.
22. Irven M. Resnick, "Medieval Roots of the Myth of Jewish Male Menses," *Harvard Theological Review* 93.3 (2000): 245–46.; Joseph Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion: The Case of Arnau de Vilanova* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 263–64.
23. Thomas of Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, 7.2.2a.3, ed. Broomfield, p. 338. Similiter periculosum est dormire cum menstruata, quia inde nascitur partus leprosus. Similiter turpissimum est iacere cum muliere iacenti in puerperio dum laborat profluvio menstrui sanguinis, quia puerpera diu habent fluxum immundi humoris.
24. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 1966). As will become clear in

the discussion below, I am not suggesting that Douglas's theories account adequately for the complexity of attitudes toward menstrual blood or pollution in medieval society, only that her explanation of marginality fits rather well with medieval notions of the danger of menstrual blood.

25. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 40.
26. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 121.
27. William MacLehose, "Nurturing Danger: High Medieval Medicine and the Problem(s) of the Child," in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 9–10.
28. B.N. lat. 366, fol. 35r, a sermon by John of Chatillon preached in Paris in 1273. Non tamen omni tempore est petendi. . .non in diebus processionis et jejuniarum non debent convenire. Item sunt ideo Ezekiel xviii: ad mulierem menstruatam non accessitur.
29. See d'Avray, "The Gospel of the Marriage Feast of Cana," pp. 207–24.
30. James of Vitry, *Sermones*, p. 156. Ad mulierem menstruatam non accesseris. Prohibitum est enim in lege, ne coëant vir et mulier tale tempore. Tunc enim foetus monstruosi et membris damnati. In an *ad status* sermon for the married, James mentioned that couples should abstain from intercourse after conception (postquam conceperint a coitu abstineret) but he offered no explanation or reason for the prohibition. B.N. lat. 17509, fol. 138.
31. William of Auvergne, *De sacramento matrimonii* 1.9 (1674; repr. Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1963), 1:526. . . .similiter tempore enixionis, seu purgationis ex partu, eo quod periculose seminaretur similiter tunc proles, propter periculum leprae, et aliarum occasionem, quae seminatis eodem tempore partubus, aut innascuntur, aut post nativitatem accidunt: manifestum est ad modicum tempus concessum esse uxorum propriarum usum.
32. Robert of Flamborough, *Liber poenitentialis*, 4.8, ed. J.J. Francis Firth (Toronto: Pontifical Intitute of Medieval Stuides, 1971), p. 197. Secundo quaero. . .In puerperio? Ad non purificatam? . . .In menstruo et puerperio multi generantur leprosi, epileptici et aliter male se habentes.
33. Peter of Poitiers, *Summa de confessione* 12, *CCCM* 51, ed. Jean Longère (Turnhout: Brepols, 1980), pp. 16–17. Item si in puerperio. Item si in menstruo, ubi est periculum etiam corporale, et patris propter periculum elephantiae, et prolis, quia ex corrupto semine nascitur corruptus fetus, et fere semper, ut asserunt physici, vel gibbosus, vel contractus, vel huiusmodi. Iudaei, quoniam ad menstruatam non accedunt, leprae macula rarius resperguntur. Peter's reference to elephantiasis probably meant one of the four forms of leprosy identified by medieval medicine.
34. For a very helpful discussion of the medieval developments of the Hippocratic, Galenic, and Arabic medical traditions as they pertained to women's healthcare, see the introduction to Green, *The Trotula*, especially pp. 18–37. For a broader discussion of their contributions to medieval medical ideas about sex and sexuality, see Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 13–39 and 57–61.

35. Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, eds., *Blood Magic: The Anthropology of Menstruation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). The editors' introduction provides a very helpful synthesis and critique of theories of pollution, including the social construction theories of Emile Durkheim and Mary Douglas. The articles in the collection demonstrate clearly the diversity of cultural beliefs about menstruation and support the editors' argument that no single theory yet proposed takes into account adequately the complexity of these beliefs. For more critical discussions of social constructionist theories of the body, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), chapter 5 and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), especially pp. 131–33.
36. See, for example, Rabanus Maurus, *Poenitentiale* 30, *PL* 110:491; Burchard of Worms, *Libri Decretorum* 19.5, *PL* 140:974.
37. Hildegard of Bingen, *Physica* 1.114, *PL* 197:1176–77.
38. A number of thirteenth-century authors wrote both medical and theological texts. Thomas of Cantimpré, for example, wrote hagiography and medical works; William of Auvergne wrote medical works and a *summa* for confessors. Even more frequent was the use of medical language in theological or pastoral works. See Joseph Ziegler, "*Ut Dicunt Medici*: Medical Knowledge and Theological Debates in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 73:2 (1999): 208–37; David C. Lindberg, "Medieval Science and Religion," in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Gary B. Ferngren, Edward L. Larson, Darrel W. Amundsen, and Anne-Marie E. Nakhla (New York: Garland, 2000), pp. 262–64; Jessalyn Bird, "Medicine for Body and Soul: Jacques de Vitry's Sermon to Hospitallers and Their Charges," in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, York Studies in Medieval Theology 3, ed. Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: York Medieval Press, 2001), pp. 91–108.
39. For a somewhat different take on clerical attitudes toward menstrual blood, see Charles de Miramon, "La fin d'un tabou? L'interdiction de communier pour la femme menstruée au moyen âge. Le cas du XIIe siècle," in *Le Sang au moyen âge: Actes du quatrième colloque international de Montpellier, Université Paul-Valéry (27–29 novembre 1997)* (Montpellier: Université Paul-Valéry, 1999), pp. 163–81.
40. Julien of Vézelay, *Sermons*, Sources Chrétiennes 192, ed. and trans. Damien Vorreux, O.F.M. (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1972), 1: 88.. . .*sicut pannus menstruatae*, quo nihil sordidius, nihil deformius, nihil quod humanus sensus magis abhorreat, excogitari potest.
41. Ambrose, *Hexameron* 5.21.67, *PL* 14:234; *Saint Ambrose: Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, The Fathers of the Church 42, trans. John J. Savage (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961), pp. 212–213. Communis omnibus generatio, integritas quoque corporis virginalis omnibus communis et partus; quoniam neque inter se ullo concubitu miscentur, nec libidine resolvuntur, nec partus quatiuntur doloribus.

42. Ambrose, *De virginibus*, 1.5.21, *PL* 16:194. Quid autem est castitas virginalis, nisi expers contagionis integritas? Translation by Peter Brown in *Body and Society*, p. 354.
43. Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 353.
44. Brown, *Body and Society*, p. 407.
45. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 13.14, *PL* 41:386, Sed jam natura erat seminalis, ex qua propagaremur: qua scilicet propter peccatum vitiata, et vinculo mortis obstricta. *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 556.
46. Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 131.
47. See n. 10 above for references to washing in the penitentials. Also, on the clerical notion that semen itself was a source of pollution, see Elliott, *Fallen Bodies*, pp. 14–34.
48. Thomas of Chobham, Sermon 12, on the Purification, in *Sermones*, *CCCM* 82A, ed. Franco Morenzoni (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), p. 124: Nec egebat beata Virgo purificari, quia de celo conceperat, scilicet de Spiritu Sancto, non de semine hominis. Precipiebatur autem in lege quod mulier que *suscepto semine masculum peperisset esset immunda*; per hoc innuens quod aliqua mulier esset paritura non *suscepto semine*. Purificauit se igitur beata Virgo ut esset obediens legi quam filius eius non venit soluere sed adimplere. . .
49. B.N. lat. 14937, fol. 137v. Mulierem enim lex immunda decreuit qui viri concepto semine peperit sed virgo beata que sic non concepit, jure legis purgari non debuit. . . .This manuscript is listed in J.B. Schneyer, *Repertorium des lateinischen Sermones des Mittlelaters für die Zeit von 1150–1350*, 9 volumes (Munich: Aschendorff, 1969–80). Sermons listed in Schneyer are identified in the notes using his numbering system; this sermon is Sch #32.
50. B.N. lat. 15953 (Sch #99), fol. 19r. Mulier si suscepto semine peperit masculum immunda est sed maria non ex viri semine sed mistico spiriti concepit dei filium. . .On the uncertain identity of William of Mailly, see L.-J. Bataillon and Nicole Bériou, " 'G. de Mailly' de l'ordre des frères prêcheurs," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 61 (1991): 7–8.
51. B.N. lat. 15962 (Sch #472), fol. 59v. Secundum legem moysi purificari voluit que nil legi debuit. Neque enim ceterarum more mulierum suscepto virili semine concepit et peperit.
52. On menstruation as a restriction to women's ordination, see Clara Maria Henning, "Canon Law and the Battle of the Sexes," in *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), pp. 271–83.
53. See, for example, Jo Ann McNamara, "The *Herrenfrage*: The Restructuring of the Gender System, 1050–1150," in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Carol A. Lees (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 3–29; Elizabeth Dachowski, "*Tertius est optimus*: Marriage, Continence, and Virginity in the Politics of Late Tenth- and Early Eleventh-Century Francia," in Frassetto, *Medieval Purity and Piety*, pp. 117–29;

Paul Beaudette, " 'In the World but Not of It': Clerical Celibacy as a Symbol of the Medieval Church," in Frassetto, *Medieval Purity and Piety*, pp. 23–46.

54. Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*, pp. 111–112.
55. Fulgent, Sermon on the Purification, *PL* 65:839. Cunctis fidelibus liquet nequaquam Redemptoris matrem ex ejus nativitate maculam contraxisse, quia. . .purgaretur. Quia sine humana concupiscentia, sine aliqua carnis corruptione virgo peperit, et sine fine virgo permansit.
56. Aelred of Rievaulx, Sermon xxxii, Sermon on the Purification, *Aelredi Rievallensis, Sermones I–XLVI*, *CCCM* 2A, ed. Gaetano Raciti (Turnhout: Brepols, 1989), p. 265. Nulla impuritas in amore eius, nulla macula, nulla vitium: ipse est enim *quem virgo conceperit*, *virgo peperit*. Natus est ergo Dominus Jesus et conceptus sine omni concupiscentia, sine omni carnali voluptate, sine omni inquinatione.
57. Fulbert of Chartres, Sermon on the Purification, *PL* 141:319. Quod praeceptum Purificatione et oblationis impleverunt aliae matres ex necessitate, quia pollutae et peccatrices erant, quando Christus natus est de beatissima Virgine Maria, ipsa non indigebat legali purificatione, quia munda erat et sancta.
58. B.N. lat. 12424 (Sch #3), fol. 88r. Non enim purgatione indiguit que in se nullam omnia maculam habuit. Triplex namque est immunditia que locum non habuit in maria scilicet immunditia ex parentibus contracta, immunditia ex pravis actibus acquisita, et immunditia ex cerimonialibus indicta. For the attribution of this sermon to Gerard, see Bériou, *L'avènement des maîtres de la parole*, p. 191, n. 210.
59. B.N. lat. 15953 (Sch #96), fol. 17r.
60. B.N. lat. 12428 (Sch #398), fol. 227v.
61. B.N. lat. 3290 (Sch #27), fols. 90–90v.
62. Ste-Geneviève ms. 240 (Sch #50), fol. 209v.
63. B.N. lat. 12428 (Sch #398), fol. 227v. Lex erat. . .pro illis que concipiebant ex virili et que erant peccatrices, hic non concepit ex virili sed opere spiritu sancti nec peccatrice erat; talis enim non sit triplex macula scilicet originalis a quam purgata fuit in utero matris, actualis vel venialis vel mortalis quam numquam habuit, tercia ex legalis.
64. B.M. Rouen, ms. 620 (Sch #91), fol. 89r. Quia ab utero matris sue repleta erat sancti extinctus fuit ignis in ea totius libidinis, imo spiritus sanctus per veniens in ea prorsus purgauit eam et a fomite totius peccati liberauit eam et ipsum fomitem videtur penitus evacuauit quia postea peccare non potuit et tum quamvis ipsa purgacione sue purificatione non indigeret.
65. The Immaculate Conception of Mary was not made official church dogma until 1854 but the idea was already current in the West in the early Middle Ages. See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), pp. 236–54, especially pp. 240–42 and Edward Dennis O'Connor, ed., *The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception: History and Significance* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), pp. xii–xiii and 187–234.

66. Huguccio argued that his views differed from those of heretics because they claimed that sexual intercourse was a mortal sin whereas he perceived it as venial only. See Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 167.
67. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 203 on Abelard and p. 421 on Albert the Great. See also, Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, pp. 136–37 and Tentler, *Sin and Confession*, p. 167.
68. Vincent Ferrer, Sermon on the Purification, S*ermones de sanctis* (Cologne, 1487), fols. 43v–47r.
69. The only other preacher I am aware of who made a similar argument in a sermon on the Purification was Ramon Lull (ca. 1232–1316); see Abraham Soria Flores, ed., *Liber de praedictione* (Palma de Mallorca: Maioricensis Schola Lullistica, 1963), p. 264.
70. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44r. Sed est hic questio. Quare deus ordinauit istam legem numquid est peccatam generare filios in statu matrimoniali.
71. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44r. Ratio illius legis est quia omnia precepta legis reducuntur et includuntur in decem preceptis decalogi qui franguntur quadrupliciter scilicet operacione, obmissione, locucione, et cogitacione. . . .Mulieres autem in concipiendo portando pariendo et nutriendo istis quattuorum modis peccant contra dei precepta. Ideo faciunt dies purgacionis.
72. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44r–44v. Primo peccant in operacione in concipiendo. Nam deus ordinauit actum generacionis ad conservacionem humane nature. Et multociens non moventur ad eam nisi sicut equus et mulus, canis vel porcus secundum carnis sensualitem cum tamen deberent habere intentione predicatoris qui predicat et convertat gentes ad deum ut paradisus impleant filiis dei. Ita genitores debent habere intencione generandi filios dei per paradiso. Ferrer was not unique in using the image of beasts to refer to human sexuality moved by passion. Guibert of Tournai and Humbert of Romans used similar language in sermons addressed to the married. Both men use the image of animals when discussing couples unable to restrain themselves in order to observe prescribed periods of abstinence. Guibert (B.N. lat. 15943, fol. 142v) says even the lower beasts abstain from intercourse during pregnancy: Imo deteriores sunt brutis que tempora coendi observant et post quam conceperint a coitu abstinent. Humbert (*Sermones beati Umberti*, Venice, 1603, sermon #51, p. 67) warns that when a married couple is not governed by love and the desire for salvation, they act like horses and mules that seek only pleasure: Interdum autem caro dominatur in conjugibus, et nulla intentione salutari utuntur matrimonio, sed sicut aequus et mulus, solam voluptatem quaerunt in opere matrimonii.
73. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44v. Secundo peccant mulieres obmissione portando quia si primo faciebant penitentiam scilicet jejunia, orationes, perigrinaciones et huiusmodi quando sunt gravide totum obmittunt. Et licet sint satis fastidiose: tamen ipse se faciunt plus fastidiosas et magis delicatas se fingunt.
74. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44v. Ideo non dimittebat aliquid de suis devotionibus ymmo amplius faciebat: quem admodum sacerdos quando portat

custodiam eukaristie est devotior. Ita virgo que custodia erat tunc corporis christi.

75. The same image is found in the homilies of the twelfth-century Cistercian Amadeus of Lausanne, who described Christ in Mary's womb as "the bread of angles that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world" and Mary as "descended from a priestly and royal stock," thus linking the priests and their transformation of the bread into the body of Christ at mass with the incarnation of Christ in Mary's womb. See *Magnificat*, p. 66. Barbara Lane explores this connection and its expression in religious art and architecture; see *The Altar and the Altarpiece*: *Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), especially pp. 41 and 68–70.
76. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44v. Tertio mulieres peccant locucione parturiendo quando enim sentiunt dolores partum: dicunt multa verba vana et indiscreta. Cum tamen deberent recurrere ad christum et dicendo Jesus et ad virginem Mariam qui sine dolores peperit et ad sanctos dei.
77. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44v. Ipse tamen alique maledictunt evam, alie viros, alia dicit. O si modo evadam nunque accedo ad virum.
78. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44v. Sed virgo in hoc non peccauit quia sine dolore et miseria peperit. Sicut radius solis transit per fenestram vitream sine ruptura. Similar images were used by other clerical writers; these are explored more fully in chapter 5.
79. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44v. Quarto mulieres peccant cogitacione nutriendo. Cogitant enim modo habeo heredem modo sum domina cum tamen in magno timore dicerent: O domine dedisti michi istum filius quid scio modo quid erit de isto filio meo si erit malus homo taliter ut me interficiat vel quod faciat aliquod malum ut sit suspensus et finaliter damnatus.
80. Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, 44v. Patet ergo quod virgo maria nullo modo peccauit nec concipiendo operacione, nec portando obmissione nec pariendo locucione nec nutriendo cogitacione tamen voluit humiliari ad servandum legem moysi ac si esset immunda et peccatrix ut cetere mulieres.
81. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Material Continuity, Personal Survival and the Resurrection of the Body: A Scholastic Discussion in Its Modern Contexts," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), pp. 239–97, 393–417.
82. Bynum, "Material Continuity," p. 258.

Chapter 4 *Salvam Fac Famulam Tuam, Domine*

1. *The Hours of Mary of Burgundy*, with a commentary by Eric Inglis (London: Harvey Miller, 1995).
2. Susan Karant-Nunn has also examined the iconography of Mary's Purification and concludes, quite differently, that the images always focus on the infant Jesus and the priest Simeon. See Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, pp. 73–74.
3. Liturgical studies is an area of intellectual pursuit with a long and rich history. A great deal of important work has been done on individual rites,

especially on the liturgies of particular sacraments such as marriage and penance. Very little, however, has been written on the liturgy of churching beyond Adolph Franz's 1909 work. For a useful historiographical survey of the field, see Eric Palazzo, *Le Moyen Âge: Des origines au XIIIe siècle*, Histoire des livres liturgiques (Paris: Beauchesne, 1993), pp. 22–43. Also see the succinct discussion of the field by Frederick Paxton in *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 9–14, which provides a historical context for understanding the development of liturgical studies. A bibliography of the most important works in liturgical studies is offered by Richard W. Pfaff, *Medieval Latin Liturgy: A Select Bibliography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

4. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, p. 16.
5. I have found one ritual for southern France, which, because of its provenance, is not included in this study. Its prayers and rubrics are nearly identical to those from northern France. For this rite, see Edmund Martène, *De antiquis ecclesiae ritibus* (Venice: Jo. Baptista Novelli, 1763), 2:137. Aimé-Georges Martimort identifies the source of this rite as an incunable for the diocese of Limoges printed around 1518 and now held at the Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris; see *La Documentation liturgique de Dom Edmund Martène, Étude codologique* (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1978), pp. 361 and 131–32.
6. The term *rituales* was first applied to these books in sixteenth-century Italy. See Palazzo, *Le Moyen Âge*, p. 203. In this chapter, the Latin *rituales* is always used to refer to the liturgical book. The English term ritual refers to the practice of the rite of churching, that is, the ritual event itself.
7. Roughly one-third of the liturgical books I examined were *rituales* or *manuales*; about three-fourth of these were monastic.
8. A description of these manuals is contained in Annik Aussedat-Minvielle, *Histoire et contenu des rituels diocésains romains imprimés en France de 1476 à 1800* (Ph.D. diss., University of Paris, 1987).
9. Aussedat-Minvielle, *Histoire et contenu*, p. 64. Aussedat-Minvielle also notes that there is a greater variation in the ritual in the seventeenth century, which he attributes to the development of local customs.
10. The study of *rituales* has not been given a great deal of attention. Some scholars credit this to the complex evolution of *rituales*, which often resulted in their assimilation into studies of other types of liturgical books rather than their being given individual analysis as a distinct form. The most important works on *rituales* are Pierre-Marie Gy, "Collectaire, rituel, processional," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 44 (1960): 441–69; Jean-Baptiste Molin and Annik Aussedat-Minvielle, *Répertoire des rituels et processionnaux imprimés en France* (Paris: CNRS, 1984). Also useful is Walter von Arx, "Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Rituale," *Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Kirchengeschichte*, 63 (1969): 39–57. In addition, shorter but valuable discussions of *rituales* can be found in Palazzo, *Le Moyen Âge*, pp. 197–203 and Cyrille Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources*, trans. William

G. Storey and Niels K. Rasmussen (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1981), pp. 257–65.

11. Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, pp. 262–64.
12. Palazzo, *Le Moyen Âge*, p. 203.
13. Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, p. 257.
14. B.M. Cambrai, ms. 236, fol. 22r. This ritual is also printed at the end of Ordo 17 in Molin and Mutembe, *Le Rituel du mariage*, p. 314.
15. B.M. Boulogne-sur-Mer, ms. 85, fols. 305r–305v. For a description of the manuscript, see Pierre Héliot, "Les manuscrits illustrés de la bibliothèque de Boulogne," *Bulletin du Comité Flamand de France* 1 (1934): 201 and 209–211. Strictly speaking, pontificals were liturgical books that contained the rites and services performed by a bishop. In reality, such books contained material used by any liturgical celebrant, not just bishops, which explains why they could include a churching ritual. On the history of pontificals, see Michel Andrieu, *Le Pontifical romain au moyen âge*, Studi et Testi 86–88, 99 (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostilica vaticana, 1938–41); Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, pp. 225–57; Palazzo, *Le Moyen Âge*, pp. 204–20; Niels K. Rasmussen, *Les Pontificaux du haut moyen âge. Genèse du livre de l'évêque*, Études et documents 49 (Louvain: Spicilegium sacram louvaniense, 1998). The Pontifical of Durand de Mende, a thirteenth-century liturgist from southern France, was very important in the development of this particular form of liturgical book. Durand, in an effort to make the Roman pontifical more useful to French bishops, excluded rites that pertained only to Rome and added material of use for diocesan practice in France. His work gained popularity rapidly, was copied often, and was widely disseminated. Since the various copies tended to reflect local practice, the surviving works described as pontificals of Durand de Mende are not all identical. The pontifical from Boulogne-sur-Mer is the only French pontifical to contain a ritual of churching. On the pontifical of Durand de Mende, see Michel Andrieu, *Le Pontifical de Guillaume Durand*, Le Pontifical romain au moyen âge 3, Studi e Testi 88 (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 1940); Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, pp. 253–55. On the work and influence of Durand, see Pierre-Marie Gy, ed., *Guillaume Durand. Évêque de Mende (vers 1230–1296), canoniste, liturgiste et homme politique*, Actes de la table ronde du CNRS, Mende, 24–27 May 1990 (Paris: CNRS, 1992). For descriptions of French pontificals, see Victor Leroquais, *Les Pontificaux manuscrits des bibliothèques publiques de France*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1937); ms. 85 from Boulogne-sur-Mer is Leroquais #29.
16. *Manual for use of Chartres* (Paris, 1490), fol. 32r. Note that this *manuale* is referred to as a *missale* in the preface of the 1490 edition. See Vogel, *Medieval Liturgy*, p. 269, n. 303.
17. *Manual for use of Paris* (Paris, 1497), fols. 94r–94v.
18. *Manual for use of Sens* (Paris, 1500), fol. 31r.
19. Martène, *De antiquis ecclesiae*, 2:136. The original manuscript for this *rituale* has apparently been lost; the only available edition is found in Martène. Martimort dates this manuscript to around 1500 but notes that, in one

place, Martène dated it to around 200. I find the latter dating improbable and, so, use Martimort's dating throughout my discussion of the text. See Martimort, *La Documentation liturgique*, pp. 86 and 361.

20. *Manual for use of Cambrai* (1503), fols. 23v–24r for purification within marriage; a separate purification rite is on fol. 24r.
21. *Manual for use of Reims* (before 1505), fols. 78v–79r.
22. It is, unfortunately, impossible to know the order of the rites in the manual for use at Châlons-sur-Marne because of the way Martène organized the edited work in which the rite is included. Martène arranged the material in *De antiquis* by topic according to rites rather than publishing the manuals *per se* with their original order intact. He did not include a separate section for rites of purification after childbirth but rather included them with the liturgies for marriage. The churching ritual for Chalôns-sur-Marne, therefore, seems to be placed after the rite of marriage but there is no guarantee that this was the placement of the rite in the original manuscript.
23. von Arx, "The Churching of Women," p. 65.
24. du Plessis, *Histoire*, 2:540.
25. Psalm 23.1–6.

    Domino est terra et plenitudo eius
    orbis terrarum et universi, qui habitant in eo.
    Quia ipse super maria fundauit eum
    Et super flumina praeparauit eum.
    Quis ascendet in montem Domini?
    Aut quis stabit in loco sancto eius?
    Innocens manibus et mundo corde,
    Qui non accepit in vano animam suam,
    Nec iurauit in dolo proximo suo.
    Hic accepiet benedictionem a Domino
    Et misericordiam a Deo salutari suo.
    Haec est generatio quaerentium eum
    Quaerentium faciem Dei Jacob.

26. Salvam fac famulam tuam N. Domine. Deus meus sperantem in te. Mitte ei domino auxilium de sancto. Et de syon tuere eam.
27. Deus qui per moisen filium tuum Israelitice plebi mandasti ut mulier que filium peperisset ab ingressu templi sequestraretur, te quaesumus ut hanc famulam tuam ab omni inquinamento peccati emundare digneris quantenus mente et corpore munda sinum matris ecclesiae valeat penetrare et tibi pro suis delictis acceptabile munus offere. Per christum dominum nostrum. . . . Amen.
28. See Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) as an example of the way images of the Church could be shaped to meet the needs and interests of the author.
29. Ingrede in domus domini et adora filium virginis qui tibi fecunditatem attulit prolis.

30. Eamon Duffy, "Lay Appropriation of the Sacraments in the Late Middle Ages," *New Blackfriars* 77.899 (1995): 56–57.
31. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 1:43–220, especially pp. 50–61 and 86–125; Fernand Cabrol, "Eau. Usage de l'eau dans la liturgie: eau bénite," *DACL* 4:1680–90; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400–c.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 280–82; Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribners, 1971), in which he describes many superstitious uses of holy water.
32. See the article "Water" by E.J. Gratsch, *NCE* 14:825–27.
33. Cabrol, *DACL*, 4:1687.
34. Cabrol, *DACL*, 4:1683 and 1684; Gratsch, "Water," 14:825.
35. Gratsch, "Water," 14:826–27.
36. Tunc aspergatur aqua benedicta super eam et postea introducatur in ecclesiam. . .
37. B.M. Boulogne-sur-Mer, ms. 85, fol. 305r.
38. On ritual as strategy, see Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p. 88 and Jonathan Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 56.
39. On the definition of ritualization, see Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p. 74 and on ritualization as distinguishing from the ordinary, p. 90.
40. On creating a follower, see Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p. 100.
41. Thomas Frederick Crane, ed., *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, Publications of the Folk-Lore Society 26 (London: David Nutt, 1890), pp. 46–47. Unde legimus de quodam heremita quod, cum vellet matrem suam ultra flumen portare, manus suas pallio involuit. Cumque mater indignaretur dicens: "Numquid mater tua sum?" respondit: "Non mireris mater, caro enim mulieris ignis est."
42. On churching as a rite of passage, see van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, pp. 46–47. On rites of institution, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univesity Press, 1991), pp. 117–118. Also important is the theory of liminality in Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), pp. 94–130.
43. van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 44. The woman being churched passed through van Gennep's three hallmarks or stages of a rite of passage: separation due to pollution, removal of barriers through purification, and reintegration through hearing mass with her neighbors.
44. von Arx, *Das Klosterrituale von Biburg*, p. 287; Franz, *Rituale von St. Florian*, p. 47.
45. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:224–29. The manuscripts cited are Ordo I, Hofbibliothek in Vienna, CVP 2090, fol. 95v, eleventh- or twelfth-century Salzburg; Ordo II, Staatbibliothek in Munich, Clm 22039, fols. 201v–203v, twelfth-century Wessobrunn; Ordo III, Lambach, CLb 73, fols. 77v–78v, twelfth century; Ordo IV, Lambach, CLb 777, fol. 23v,

twelfth century; Ordo V, Staatbibliothek in Munich, Clm 16401, fol. 109v, twelfth-century monastery of St. Zeno; Ordo VI, St. Paul in Kärnten, CSPH 27.5.34, fol. 52v, mid-fifteenth century.

46. *Manual et processional ad usum insignis ecclesiae Eboracensis*, Surtees Society 63, ed. William G. Henderson (Edinburgh: Andrews and Co., 1875), pp. 213⋆–214⋆. For the dating and identification of this pontifical, see *Liber pontificalis Christopher Bainbridge, archiepiscopi Eboracensis*, Surtees Society 61, ed. William G. Hendeson (Edinburgh: Andrews and Co., 1875), p. xli.
47. My thanks to Becky R. Lee for the correct identification of this rite. A full description of the various English manuscripts and editions of the rite *Ad introducendam* can be found in her dissertation, "'Women ben purifyid of her childeryn': The Purification of Women after Childbirth in Medieval England" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1998).
48. *Manuale ad usum percelebris ecclesie Sarisburiensis*, Henry Bradshaw Society 91, ed. A. Jefferies Collins (Chichester: Moore and Tillyer, 1960), pp. 43–44.
49. Henderson, *Manual et processional*, p. 213⋆; Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:228.
50. Psalm 120.1–2, 5–8.

    Levaui oculos meos in montes
    unde veniet auxilium mihi.
    Auxilium meum a Domino
    Qui fecit caelum et terram. . .
    Dominus protectio tua, super manum dexteram tuam,
    Per diem sol non uret te,
    Neque luna per noctem.
    Dominus custodit te ab omni malo.
    Custodiat animam tuam Dominis.
    Dominus custodiat introitum tuum et exitum tuum
    Ex hoc nunc et usque in saeculum.

51. Henderson, *Manual et processional*, p. 213⋆. Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, qui hanc feminam de pariendi periculo liberasti, in servitio tuo tibi fac eam esse devotam, ut temporali cursu fideliter peracto, sub alis misericordiae tuae continue requiescens quietem perpetuam consequatur. Per Christum.
52. Verbal communication from Becky R. Lee.
53. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:234.
54. A.N. JJ195, fol. 328r. ". . .the celebration of 'l'amessment' for one of his daughters who had given birth to a child."
55. For full citations, see nn. 16–21 above. For a discussion of the German liturgies, see Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, pp. 76–77 and 80; on the English rites, see Lee, "Women ben purifyid of her childeryn," pp. 9–18; also, see Pierce, " 'Green Women' and Blood Pollution," pp. 198–203.
56. Mulieres autem post partum completo certo dierum numero: ut moris est purificande accedunt ad ecclesiam missam audiure: In fine vero misse muliere astante prope altare, presbyter manutense [*or* manu tenens] panem aptum ad benedicendum dicit.

57. Adiutorium nostrum in nomine domini. Qui fecit celum et terram. Sit nomen domini benedictum. Et hoc nunc et usque in seculum. Oremus. Benedic domine hanc creaturam panis qui benedixisti quinque panes in deserto: ut manducans eum purgata a vitiis salutem consequatur mentis et corporis. In nomine [+] patris et filii et spiritus sancti. Amen.
58. On lay understanding of and participation in the mass during the late Middle Ages, see Virginia Reinburg, "Liturgy and the Laity in Late Medieval and Reformation France," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 23.3 (1992): 526–46; John Bossy "The Mass as a Social Institution, 1200–1700," *Past and Present* 100 (August 1983): 29–61 and *Christianity in the West, 1400–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 66–72; Jacques Toussaert, *Le Sentiment religieux en Flandre à la fin du moyen âge* (Paris: Plon, 1963), pp. 160–203; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 109–21; Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (1945; repr. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), pp. 598–608.
59. du Plessis, *Histoire*, 2:540–41.
60. LaLore, *Cartulaire de Montier-la-Celle*, p. 271, charter #228; see p. 30 and n. 74 above.
61. The letter of remission for Mahieu de Soillouel, issued in 1387, described a seat in the local parish church used by Mahieu's wife on the day of her churching. A.N. JJ131, fols. 149v–150r. ". . .un certain siege de fust de la hauteur de deux pies et demi ou environ pour——sa dicte femme la quelle avoit jeu denfant et devoit relever le dit jour. Le quel siege ne portoit prejudice a personne mais estoit embelissement a la dicte eglise."
62. In the last decade of the fifteenth century, William Trochon was accused before the local episcopal court for having taken home the bread and wine carried by his wife as an offertory gift at her mass of purification. A.D. de l'Yonne G253, fol. 3v. Register from the *officialité* of Saint-Julien, 1490–99. Guillemus trochon laicus de Jocniaco. . .postquam uxor sua die sue purificare obtulerat vinum et panem. . .
63. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 215. On the last Gospel, see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 214–216 and 281; Atchley, "Some Notes on the Beginning and Growth of the Usage of a Second Gospel at Mass," 161–76; Ludwig Eisenhofer, *The Liturgy of the Roman Rite*, ed. H.E. Winstone., trans. A.J. and E.F. Peeler (1924; repr. Edinburgh: Nelson, 1961), pp. 323–33; Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:229–30.
64. Rogation days were the three days immediately preceding Ascension Day and were marked by processions. Since Rogation days came in the spring, the processions went around the fields and prayed for good weather and fertility. See Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 136–39; Toussaert, *Le Sentiment*, pp. 245–57.
65. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:212–213. For a discussion of the belief that spirits were physically present in the body of the possessed and could manifest themselves as visible protrusions or illnesses, see Nancy Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42.2 (2000): 279–85.

66. On the custom of blessed bread, see Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 1:247–56; Toussaert, *Le Sentiment*, pp. 165 and 184–87; Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, 2:425–55; Jean Leclercq, "Eulogie," *DACL*, 5:733–34; Eisenhofer, *Liturgy of the Roman Rite*, pp. 367–68; Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 63–64 and 73–74; Reinburg, "Liturgy," 539–41.
67. Duffy gives English examples of contention arising because of a perceived failure to distribute the bread in the proper order; see *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 127.
68. A.D. de l'Yonne G253, fol. 3v. Register from the *officialité* of Saint-Julien, 1490–99. Guillemus trochon laicus de Jocniaco quidem in emenda eo quod postquam uxor sua die sue purificare obtulerat vinum et panem ipse cepit dictam oblacionem et reportauit ad domum suam in scandalum plurimorum. taxata ad xv solidi.
69. The *pax* was a wooden or metal round, often decorated with symbols of Christ, passed among the congregation as a substitute for the reception of communion.
70. On the liturgical uses of the kiss, see Fernand Cabrol, "Baiser," *DACL* 2:117–30; B.I. Mullahy, "Kiss, Liturgical," *NCE*, 8:207; Nicolas J. Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretive History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 13–23 and 31–42; Josef Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great*, trans. Francis A. Brunner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), pp. 128–29 and *Mass of the Roman Rite*, 2:321–32.
71. Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane*, pp. 15–16.
72. Rom. 16:16, I Cor. 16:20, II Cor. 13:12, I Thess. 5:26.
73. Cabrol, "Baiser," *DACL*, 2:119.
74. Cabrol, "Baiser," *DACL*, 2:127.
75. Mullahy, "Kiss, Liturgical," 8:207.
76. Bossy, *Christianity*, p. 70; also see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, pp. 74–76.
77. Reinburg, "Liturgy," 539.
78. Reinburg, "Liturgy," 539.
79. This option is included in the ordo for Paris and the ordo for Reims.
80. M. McCance, "Stole," *NCE*, 13:722 and Jungmann, *Mass of the Roman Rite*, 1:285. As with other vestments, prayers were said as the stole was put on.
81. Jungmann, *Mass of the Roman Rite*, 1:280.
82. Today, Catholic priests kiss the stole before they put it on but I have not seen any discussion of this as a medieval custom and have not been able to determine when or where the custom originated.
83. For kissing the altar, see Jungmann, *Mass of the Roman Rite*, 1:267.
84. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, 2:234.
85. Bell, *Ritual Theory*, pp. 108–10.
86. I am drawing here on the notion of habitus as used by Pierre Bourdieu. As he defines the term it means a socially constructed system of cognitive and motivational structures that act as the filter through which a group

understands and makes sense of the world. Without habitus, communication is impossible; see *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 72–95, especially 76 and 79–80.

87. Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p. 190.
88. Bell, *Ritual Theory*, p. 108.
89. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 41.
90. Avril, *Les Statuts synodaux angevins*, p. 65. Item prohibemus ne alique mulieres sedeant infra cancellum in horis canonicis. [We order that no women should sit inside the chancel during the canonical hours.] Ivo of Chartres made similar statements in the *Decretum*, 2.135, *PL* 161:197–98. Ut mulieres ad altare non accedant et de officiis virorum se non intromittant. [Women should not come near the altar and should not let themselves in [to the chancel?] during the men's offices.] And *Decretum* 2.137. Ut laici secus altare quo sancta mysteria celebrantur inter clericos tam ad vigilias quam ad missam, stare vel sedere penitus non praesumant, sed pars illa quae cancellis ob altari dividitur tantum psallentibus pateat clericis. Ad adorandum vero et communicandum laicis et feminis, sicut mos est, pateant sancta sanctorum. [The laity otherwise should not presume to stand or sit close by the altar where the sacred mysteries are celebrated, among the clergy, but that part of the chancel which is separated from the altar as well as from the chanting clergy should be accessible [to them]. The holy of holies should be accessible to lay men and women for adoration and communion, as indeed is the custom.]
91. Molin and Mutembe, *Le rituel du mariage*, pp. 228–29.
92. For a short but sensitive description of this ritual, see Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession*, pp. 63–64.
93. Pontal, *Les Statuts de Paris*, p. 88. Item precipitur presbyteris ut quando mulieres post puerperium veniant ad purificationem eis dent tantummodo panem benedictum et corpus Domini eis nulli modo prepinent nisi expresse petant et prius confesse fuerint.
94. Marténe, *Thesaurus novus anecdotorum*, 4:902.
95. Jusselin, "Statuts synodaux," 105. Item statuimus quod mulier purificatura sumens post missam panem benedictum non flectat genua in gradu altaris, nec tundat pectus, nec dicat "Confiteor," nec sacerdos illi panem conferat, sed ipsa eumdem panem propria sua manu sumat super altare vel seorsum ecclesiam, ne credat accipere corpus Domini. [We order that a purified woman taking blessed bread after mass should not genuflect on the altar step, nor beat (her) breast, nor say "I confess"; neither should the priest hand the bread to her but, instead, she should take that same bread with her own hand at the altar or outside the church lest she should believe that she is receiving the body of the Lord.]
96. Gousset, *Les Actes*, 2:629. Insuper quia in nostra diocesi consuetum est in pluribus locis quod quando mulieribus quae post partum ad ecclesiam propter purificationem veniunt, post missam hostia non consecrata a presbyteris tribuitur, simplices genua flectunt, ac si daretur eis corpus Christi, nuntient eis presbyteri nihil dare nisi panem purum, aliter facerent eas

idololatrare. [Moreover, since in our diocese it is the custom in several places that when unconsecrated hosts are distributed after Mass by the priest to women who come for purification after childbirth, the simple women genuflect as if the body of Christ was being given to them. The priests should make known to them that they are giving nothing except plain bread; other wise, they are making the women commit idolatry.]

97. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 79–141.

Chapter 5 *Si Vero Mulier Gravi Infirmitate*

1. Gail McMurray Gibson makes a similar point in "Blessing from Sun and Moon," pp. 145–47.
2. Grethe Jacobsen, "Pregnancy and Childbirth in the Medieval North: A Topology of Sources and a Preliminary Study," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 9.2 (1984): 107.
3. Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth," p. 73, provides a description of a seventeenth-century birthing room in England. Kay Staniland, "Royal Entry into the World," in *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. Daniel Williams (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1987), p. 302, describes an English royal birthing chamber and suggests that similar practices were followed on the Continent. Evidence for the birthing rooms of ordinary French women is very slim, but see Biller, "Childbirth in the Middle Ages," 45.
4. Biller, "Childbirth in the Middle Ages," 45.
5. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Woman Born: Representations of Caesarean Birth in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 15–21.
6. See Katherine Taglia, "Delivering a Christian Identity: Midwives in Northern French Synodal Legislation, c. 1200–1500," in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: York University Press, 2001), pp. 77–90. Anne Saunier notes that while fifteenth-century records from the *officialité* of Josas clearly indicate that midwives were licensed and made to swear an oath, it is unclear what, precisely, they were being licensed to do; see "Le Visiteur, les femmes et les 'obstetrices' des paroisses de l'archdiaconé de Josas de 1458 à 1470," in *Santé, médecine et assistance au Moyen Âge*, Acted du 110e congrès national des sociétés savantes, Montpellier, 1985 (Paris, 1987), p. 48.
7. Green, *The Trotula*, pp. 100–103.
8. Jacobsen, "Pregnancy and Childbirth," p. 102. On poor diet and maternal mortality, see Vern Bullough and Cameron Campbell, "Female Longevity and Diet in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 55.2 (1980): 317–25.
9. Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 26.
10. David Herlihy and Christine Klapish-Zuber, *Tuscans and Their Families* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 277.

11. Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, p. 25.
12. Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, pp. 25–26.
13. Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Not of Women Born*, pp. 8–10; also see Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp. 25–33, for the spread of stories about these saints and the miraculous births associated with them.
14. Marianne Elsakkers, "In Pain You Shall Bear Children (Gen. 3:16): Medieval Prayers for a Safe Delivery," in *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Anne-Marie Korte (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 179–209. Elsakkers argues that they were part of an oral, often vernacular, tradition designed to be recited in the birthing room when the mother was in active labor. She suggested that they may have been used as a kind of medieval Lamaze.
15. This lack of interest in the child was not always the case in other regions. Some German rites, for example, included a blessing for the child; see Franz, *Die Kirchlichen*, 2:227–28, Ordo 6.
16. Wilson, "The Ceremony of Childbirth," pp. 75–78 describes the lying-in customs of seventeenth-century England, which seem, in many ways, similar to those for medieval France.
17. *Les Quinze joyes de mariage*, second edition (Paris: P. Jannet, 1858), written between 1372 and 1461, probably ca. 1400; also available in English as *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage*, trans. Brent A. Pitts (New York: Peter Lang, 1985). "Les Ténèbres de mariage," in *Recueil de poésies françoises des XVe et XVIe siècles*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon (Paris: P. Jannet, 1855).
18. *Les Quinze joyes*, pp. 22, 24, 26–27.
19. "Les Ténèbres," p. 23. "Vous ne veistes onc tel caquet." [You never saw such cackling.]
20. "Les Ténèbres," p. 23, "Et voilà le pauvre Jaquet qui luy servira de lacquet, de chamberière et de varlet." [And there's poor Jack who serves as lackey, chambermaid, and squire.]
21. Vaultier, *Le folklore pendant la Guerre de Cent Ans*, also used letters of remission, *Les Quinze joies*, and "Les Ténèbres" to discuss lying-in. Unfortunately, Vaultier seems to have accepted the misogynistic evidence from literary satire rather than the less elaborate but more realistic accounts in letters of remission.
22. I found only four descriptions of lying-in in over 1,400 letters of remission.
23. See the discussion of the term *gesine* in the introduction.
24. C. Dehaisnes, ed., *Documents et extraits divers concernant l'histoire de l'art dans la Flandre, l'Artois et le Hainaut avant le XVe siècle* (Lille: L. Danel, 1886), 1:73–76.
25. JJ 118, fol. 90v.
26. Dehaisnes, *Documents et extraits divers*, 1:74.
27. JJ 119, fol. 88r.
28. JJ 154, fol. 257v.
29. Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, pp. 37–39, 45.
30. Dehaisnes, *Documents et extraits divers*, 1:73,. . .un pot d'argent a mettre lait a couvesle. . .une petite cuillier d'or a manger papin.
31. Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, pp. 40–42.

32. JJ 154, fol. 257v. Contenant comme le ii jour de septembre dereniermentpasse ou environs ledit Guillaume et Jehan le Guidre eussent envoie leurs femmes en la ville de Marcilley sur la riviere d'Eure en la maison de Jehan Richart leur parent a cause de sa femme qui gisoit de gesine pour icelle visiter ainsi que les femmes ont acoustume de faire et apres ce lesdiz Guillaume et Jehan eussent emprunte deux chevaulx sur les quelz ilz fussent montez et fussent alez au disner avecques leur dites femmes en la maison dudit Richart leur parent et quant ilz avoient disner ensemble se partirent pour eulz en retourner en leurs hostelz.
33. JJ 118, fol. 90v. Et que ainsi quil sen retour noient et lamit[?] entre eulx deux une rote de paroles et tencon lun contre lautre qui par la temptacion de lanemi le quel chastun jour se paine dempeschere humaine creature.
34. JJ 118, fol. 90v. Que environs dix huit ans a [Pierre] et fue Guillaume Baril son frere aleret dun commun accord aimable veore une leur suer qui estaoit en gesine denfant.
35. JJ 119, fol. 88r. Nous avons este expose de la partie de Pierre Lequien, pouvre laboureur. Que comme pour certaines presumpcions et commune renommee le dit exposant lust par plusieurs fois defendu a Gillet le Monie qui estoit vraysemblablement souspeconue de commettre adultere avec sa femme que ycellui Gilet [sic] nalast ne venist en sa maison. Et il soit ainsi que apres de dit defense ainsi fuite au dit Gilet ycellui, qui perserevait en sa mauviase volente et fait dampnable du dit adultere, fust venu un certain jour en las maison du dit exposant veoir sa femme la quelle gisant denfant en sa chambre, et le quel Gilet ycelliu exposant trouva en sa dite chambre. The letter goes on to record that when Peter found Gillet in the bedroom with his wife, the men fought and Peter killed Gillet.
36. JJ 169, fol. 300r. Thomasina [?] la Postoire, femme de Pierre Postoire, . . . estoit acouchee denfant. Robuit de Laimoy, femme de Jehan de Laimoy, suer de ladite acouchee vint veoir sa suer acouchee.
37. Karant-Nunn notes that the German custom was to wait six weeks after birth before coming for churching; see *Reformation of Ritual*, p. 79; English customs varied but were about a month; see Lee "Women ben purifyid of her childeryn," pp. 33–34.
38. See chapter 1, p. 22.
39. Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen*, pp. 297–98.; Ivo, *Decretum* 8:88, *PL* 161:601–602; Gratian, *Decretum* 1.5.2, Friedberg, 1:7–8.
40. Thomas of Chobham, *Summa confessorum*, 7.2.2a.3, ed. Broomfield, p. 338; John of Fribourg, *Summa confessorum*, 3.2.45, Si mulieres post partum intrare voluerunt ecclesiam ad agendum gratias non peccant nec sunt prohibende. Si tamen ex veneratione voluerunt aliquam diu abstinere devotio earum non est improbanda.
41. du Plessis, *Histoire*, 2:540. De veritate autem Evangelicae Legis mulier enixa, nec propter puerperium immunda habetur, neque ei purificationis dies indicuntur; neque Ecclesiae aditus prohibetur. . .Verum si mulier post emissam prolem ex humilitate, Deique et Ecclesiae reverentia ac veneratione, ab ingressu ipsius Ecclesiae aliquandiu voluerit abstinere et abstinuerit, id a jure

minime reprobatur sed potius commendatur. Proinde. . .in nostra Diocesi hactenus observatam consuetudinem, qua mulieres quae post earum de legitimo matrimonio partum abstinuerint, ut praefertur, evolutis certis diebus ad Ecclesiam pergentes a parrochiali Presbytero, cum aspersione aquae exorcizatae, introducuntur, et ibi panis eisdem porrigitur benedictus.

42. Pontal, *Les statuts de 1230 à 1260*, p. 479. Precipiant etiam decani presbyteris ut ante statutum tempus ab ecclesia maxime pecunie interventu non recipiant mulieres ad purificationem nisi de licentia officialis vel archidiaconi. Also in Bessin, *Concilia*, 2:78. The same statute was also issued at Rouen in 1484; see *Statuta Rhotomagensis diocèses*, fol. 23v.
43. In a medical text that Monica Green has identified as *De genitalibus membris*, composed by Constantine the African or one of his students, the author states that a woman would be purged of a male child in twenty-five days and from a female in thirty-five. Green, "The *De genecia* Attributed to Constantine the African," *Women's Healthcare*, p. 320.
44. Gousset, *Les actes*, p. 493 and B.N. lat. 1591, fol. 17r. Statuimus. . .quodque sacerdotes mulieres non purificent, praeterquam in mortis articulo, nisi jacuerint per mensem post nativitatem sui partus.
45. The traditional Chinese practice of new mothers "doing the month," for example, rests on a complex set of dietary and humoral principals couched in terms of *yin* and *yang*; see Pillsbury, "Doing the Month," pp. 129–35. Pillsbury also notes variations in the duration of post-partal customs, ranging from as many as forty days to as few as seven; see p. 142.
46. *Manual for use of Paris*, fol. 94v; *Manual for use of Reims*, fol. 79r; Châlons-sur-Marne in Martène, *De antiquis*, 2:136. Si vero mulier gravi infirmitate ante tempus purificandi in domo detineatur et requirat se esse purificandam presbyter accedat ad eam. . .
47. Si autem voluerit recipere corpus christi nulla alia purificatio pergenda est. Quia corpus christi omnia purgat vicia.
48. See chapter 4, p. 84 n. 22 above.
49. Frederick Paxton has carefully and persuasively outlined the development of prayers for the sick in *Christianizing Death*; also, see Darrel W. Amundsen, *Medicine, Society, and Faith in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 184–96 and Admundsen's earlier article, "The Medieval Catholic Tradition," in *Caring and Curing: Health and Medicine in the Western Religious Traditions*, ed. Darrell W. Amundsen and Ronald L. Numbers (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 65–107.
50. On leprosy in general, see F-O. Touati, *Maladie et société au moyen âge: La lèpre,les lépreux et les léproseries dans le province ecclésiastique de Sens jusqu'au milieu du XIVe siècle* (Brussels: De Boeck Université, 1998); Françoise Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux au moyen âge, une société d'exclus* (Paris: Éditions Imago, 1988) and *Des Lépreux aux cagots* (Bordeaux: Université de Bordeaux III, 1996). For a political and social argument on the development of hostility toward lepers in the central and later Middle Ages, see Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting*, pp. 45–60. Moore's idea that lepers

caused fear and horror, however, needs to be modified; see, for example, Luke Demaitre, "The Description and Diagnosis of Leprosy by Fourteenth-Century Physicians," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 59 (1985): 327–44, in which he argues that physicians were not handicapped by fear and hostility in their dealings with lepers but rather took a scientific and rational approach to the disease.

51. *Manual for use of Reims*, fols. 74r–78v.
52. Paxton, *Christianizing Death*, pp. 32–33.
53. See, for example, the *Manuale ad usum percelebris ecclesia Sarisburiensis*, pp. 97–107 or the *Manual for use of Sens*, fols. 40v–41r.
54. Gibson explores the idea of churching as healing as it was expressed in fifteenth-century plays of the East Anglian *N-Town Cycle*; see "Blessing from Sun and Moon," p. 147.
55. Bériac, *Histoire des lepreux*, p. 101–102.
56. Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion*, p. 106.
57. Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession," pp. 279–85.
58. Ziegler, *Medicine and Religion*, p. 155.
59. See, for example, Ambrose's presentation of Mary as the ideal of virginity in *De virginibus* 2:2, *PL* 16:208–211; Hugh of Saint-Victor's defense of Mary's perpetual virginity in *De beatae Mariae virginitate* 1, *PL* 176:857; Geoffrey of Vendôme's praise of Mary's perpetual virginity in a Christmas sermon, *PL* 157:214.
60. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, explained Mary's perpetual virginity in euphemistic language in Sermon 3 on the Purification, *PL* 183:370. Ita sane ut intrante et exuent Domine. . .porta orientatis clausa jugiter preseveret. [Surely by the entering in and the coming forth of the Lord. . .the eastern gate was perpetually kept closed.]
61. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, 3.28.2. Edition, p. 124. Primo quidem, quia hoc competebat proprietati ejus qui nascebatur, qui est Verbum Dei. Nam Verbum non solum in corde absque corruptione concipitur, sed etiam absque corruptione ex corde procedit. Unde ut ostenderetur quod illus esset corpus ipsius Verbi Dei, conveniens fuit ut de incorrupto virginis utero nasceretur. The idea of Christ as the Word is also connected with the belief that Mary conceived through her ear.
62. Vincent Ferrer, *Sermones de sanctis*, fol. 44v. Sed virgo in hoc non peccauit quia sine dolore et miseria peperit. Sicut radius solis transit per fenestram vitream sine ruptura.
63. Goeffrey of Vendôme, Sermon on the Purification, *PL* 157:262–63. Sancta etenim virgo fuit et in conceptione, et in nativitate prolis, et idcirco puer natus ex ea vulvam ejus non aperuit, licet per illam illius uteri portam nasceretur. Porta ventris ejus virginis exstitit vulva ejus de qua Ezekiel propheta sic loquitur: Est porta in domo Domini clausa, et non aperieteur. On medieval confusion about the female anatomy, see Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 25–62.

64. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, pp. 25–49.
65. Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, p. 111.
66. On the development of this idea in Augustine's writing, see Elizabeth A. Clark, " 'Adam's Only Companion': Augustine and the Early Christian Debate on Marriage," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 21(1986): 139–62.
67. Paschasius Radbertus, *Opusculum de partu virginis* 1, *PL* 120:1371. . . .sine dolore et sine gemitu, sine molestia et aerumna, sine tristitia et afflictione, quoniam haec omnia justissime damnatae carnis in prima origine retributiones sunt et vindictae.
68. Paschasius Radbertus, *Opusculum de partu virginis* 1, *PL* 120:1376. Non potest fieri. . .ut ipse Christus tormenta in ortu suo matri attulerit. . . .et ideo alia erat purgatio illa feminarum, in qua purgabantur non minus delicta animarum quam et vitia corporum; et alia purgatio Mariae, in qua non ob aliud quam pro mysterio consuetudo legis servatur.
69. Peter of Blois, Sermon 11, on the Purification, *PL* 207:593. . . .quasi aliquid muliebre passa sit vel in conceptu, vel in partu muliebris infirmitatis quaerit remedia, et legi subjicitur?
70. Guerric of Igny, *Liturgical Sermons*, Cistercian Fathers Series 8, trans. monks of Mount St. Bernard Abbey (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1970), p. 120.
71. B.N. lat. 16471 (Sch. #273), fol. 288v. Ut vere humilitis extremis exhiberet et ut pacem proximiorem observaret, incorrupta virgo corruptarum puerperarum legalem ritum in purgatione non declinauit.
72. Absalon of Saint-Victor, Sermon 16, on the Purification, *PL* 211:97–98. Verumtamen lex ista data est purificandae, non purificatae; peccatrici, non ab utero sanctificatae; mulieri, non virgini; corruptioni, non integritati. Qua enim egeret purificatione. . .quae solo verbo Filium Dei concepit, absque dolore peperit?
73. B.N. lat. 12412 (Sch #401), fol. 37r. Mandatum illiud legis dum parientum purificatione mulierum cui nichil debebat ut pote qui tota munda erat et pura cum tanta tamen diligentia observauit periti more medici qui potionem salubrem quam infirmus ab hortet pior ebibit ut suo exemplo ad bibendum [illegible word].
74. See chapter 3, p. 67.
75. Resnick, "Myth of Jewish Male Menses," 245–46.
76. Gratian, *Decretum*, 1.5.1–4, 1:7–9, ed. Friedberg. Gratian's argument was often repeated in confessors' manuals so that priests would use the opportunity of penance to educate the laity on this issue.
77. Information on women's health in developing nations is available through the World Health Organization website, www.who.int.
78. The Galenic and Hippocratic traditions believed that women also had semen that was released in intercourse and, therefore, would accumulate in the absence of sexual activity.
79. On the theory of the wandering womb and uterine suffocation, see Green, *The Trotula*, pp. 22–31.

Chapter 6 *Toute Bonne Femme*

1. The image is from the hour of None in a *Book of Hours, for use of Rome* (Paris, 1497), published by Philippe Pigouchet.
2. The same image, always placed at the hour of None, is also in a *Book of Hours, for use of Rome* (Paris, 1498), *Book of Hours, for use of Bourges* (Paris, 1496) and *Book of Hours, for use of Paris* (Paris, 1498). All of these were published by Philippe Pigouchet.
3. B.N. lat. 833, fol. 179r, missal, last quarter of the twelfth century; B.N. lat. 9438, fol. 29r, sacramentary, first half of the twelfth century. The identification and dating of the manuscripts in this chapter follow that of Victor Leroquais.
4. B.N. lat. 12054, fol. 172v, missal, early twelfth century.
5. In two of these cases, B.N. lat. 824, fol. 197v, missal, mid-thirteenth century and B.N. lat. 9441, fol. 139v, missal, mid-thirteenth century, it is impossible to determine the sex of the figure who stands near Mary but plays no role in the ritual. These may represent Anna although that is not entirely clear.
6. B.M. Rouen ms. 370, fol. 10r, pontifical, first half of the thirteenth century; B.N. lat. 15615, fol. 256r, missal, mid-thirteenth century; B.N. lat. 9442, fol. 255r, missal, second half of the thirteenth century; Ste-Gen. ms. 102, fol. 289r, missal, thirteenth century; B.N. lat. 1077, fols. 11v and 210r, psalter and book of hours, second half of the thirteenth century.
7. B.N. fr. 409, fol. 16r, book of sermons, fourteenth century; Arsenal ms. 595, fols. 90r and 288r, missal, early fourteenth century; Arsenal ms. 608, fol. 249r, missal, early fourteenth century.
8. B.M. Reims ms. 358, fol. 66v, book of hours, late fifteenth century; B.N. lat. 14282, fol. 187r, missal, second half of the fifteenth century; the following fifteenth-century books of hours from the Bibliothèque Nationale: lat. 1168, fol. 47r; lat. 1370, fol. 96r; lat. 1372, fol. 49r; lat. 1373, fol. 42v; lat. 1384, fol. 78r; lat. 13299, fol. 82r; and a printed book of hours (Paris, 1498), unfoliated.
9. In ten of the twelve images that have someone other than a woman carrying these objects, it seems to be Joseph, although he is sometimes difficult to identify.
10. B.N. lat. 1158, fol. 87v, book of hours, first half of the fifteenth century.
11. A notable manuscript in this regard is the *Très riches heures* of the Duke of Berry, which contains an unusual image of the Purification that portrays Mary surrounded by a huge crowd. See the facsimile edition, *Très riches heures du Duc de Berry* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984).
12. *Book of Hours, for use of Reims* (n.p., 1495), fol. 61r.
13. B.N. lat. 14899 (Sch #20), fol. 48r. Secunda purgari voluit propter eius humilitatem et tamen alius[?] mulieribus comitatem quia sicut singularias superbia est. et dicit Bernardus virgo beata tamen non habes et tibi opus non est purificari. . .ergo intra mulieres sicut una illarum. . .beata virgo purgari voluit proprie propter obediencie probatam et propter eius humilitatem.

14. Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones*, p. 342. Esto inter mulieres tamquam una earum, nam et filius tuus sic est in numero puerorum.
15. See chapter 3, pp. 63–64.
16. Bériou, *L'avènement*, p. 707.
17. B.N. lat. 16481 (Sch #70), fol. 100r. "[Qui] fuit sanctificata ab utero ad morem et legem, *a la costume et a la loi*, aliarum mulierem voluit purificari." See Bériou, *L'avènement*, pp. 86–87 and 93 on Raoul of Châteauroux as the recorder of this sermon and Annex 11, p. 707, on the manuscript B.N. lat. 16481.
18. My thanks to Nicole Bériou for suggesting to me in a personal communication this understanding of Raoul's role.
19. Thomas of Chobham, *Sermones*, p. 124. Purificauit se igitur beata Virgo ut esset obediens legi quam filius eius non venit soluere sed adimplere, et ut morem gereret aliis mulieribus quadam societate familiaritatis.
20. B.N. lat. 16481 (Sch #72), fol. 104v. . . .voluit aliis mulieribus societatem portare et ideo multum honorauit eas in hoc. . . .This sermon has been edited by Nicole Bériou in *La Predication de Ranulphe de la Houblonnière: Sermons aux clercs et aux simples gens à Paris au XIIIe siècle* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1987), 2:42–71.
21. B.N. lat. 15947 (Sch # 570), fol. 111r. Scitis quod Purificatio festum est mulierum, mulieri enim sit et a mulieribus.
22. Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 81.
23. Nicole Bériou suggests the sermons preached at the beguinage in Paris attracted a wider audience than just the beguines; see "La Predication au béguinage de Paris pendant l'année liturgique 1272–1273," *Recherches Augustiniennes* 13 (1978): 117–119.
24. Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, *EETS*, o.s. 212, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen (London, 1961), p. 198. Sche had swech holy thowtys & meditacyons many tymes whan sche saw women ben purifyid of her childeryn. Sche thowt in her sowle Þat sche saw owr Lady ben purifijd & had hy contemplacyon in Þe beheldyng of Þe women wheche comyn to offeryn with Þe women Þat weryn purifijd Hir mende was al drawyn fro Þe erdly thowtys & erdly syghtys & sett al to-gedyr in gostly syghts, whech wer so delectabyl & so deuowt & Þat sche myth not in Þe tyme of feuowr wythstondyn hir wepyng.
25. Gail McMurray Gibson also argues that Margery's reaction was different in degree rather than in kind from that of most women. See "Blessing from the Sun and Moon," p. 148.
26. B.M. Rouen ms. 287, fol. 179r, fifteenth century. Missal belonging to the Order of Our Lady of Carmel at Rouen. There are, also, two men in this image. One is clearly Joseph who stands near Mary and carries a lighted candle. The other man watches the event from behind the altar, which separates him from the Holy Family and the group of women.
27. B.M. Boulogne-sur-Mer, ms. 85, fol. 305r. See fig. 1 and chapter 4, above for a fuller description of this image.
28. See chapter 2, above.

29. "The Life of Saint Elizabeth," in *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century*, Brigitte Cazelles (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991), p. 159.
30. *Le Livre du chevalier de la Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon (Paris: P. Jannet, 1854), p. 167. Celle bonne dame, quant elle avoit eu enffant, elle faisoit venir ses prestres et ses clers, et leur faisoit rendre graces et mercier Dieu, et faisoit faire simple levailles, sans grand arrois, mais á ses levailles elle faysoit donner á manger aux povres qui prioient pour son enffant. The book was originally written in 1371 and 1372.
31. Dehaisnes, *Documents et extraits divers*, 1:74.
32. *Les Quinze joyes de mariage*, pp. 27–28; translation by Pitts in *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage*, p. 27.
33. *Les Quinze joyes de mariage*, p. 31; translation by Pitts in *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage*, p. 30.
34. On German churching feasts, which were only for the mother and her female friends, see Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Ritual*, p. 81; on English feasts, see Lee, "Women ben purifyid of her childeryn," pp. 135–40, and Cressy, "Purification, Thanksgiving," pp. 112–113.
35. JJ120, fol 151v. Le jeudi apres la feste saint mahieu derniermentpassee [Jourdain] ala en hostel de Jehan Decquetot le juene en la paroisse de la chapelle de Bernonville pourceque la femme dudit Jehan que estoit cousine de sa femme devoit relever icellui jour or la fu le dit Jourdain et sa femme au diner et firent bonne cher ensembles ainsi que entre voisins et amis est acoustume a faire en tel cas. . .
36. Artisans are mentioned in JJ147, fol. 38r (*varlet de forge*), JJ118, fol. 181r (*charpentier*), and JJ120, fol. 30v (*boucher*). Gentlemen or bourgeoisie in JJ151, fol. 28v (*chevalier*), JJ135, fols. 35v–36v (*preudehomme*), and JJ175, fol. 38r (*escuier*). Laborers in JJ120, fol. 58v, JJ173, fols. 97r and 108v, JJ175, fol. 8r, JJ146, fol. 176r (*pouvre jeune homme* or *pouvre laboureur*).
37. JJ175, fol. 8r, remission of John Graindorge. "Et ces paroles dites, icelui Grente print un pain, dont il voulu fraper ledit Graindorge," in le Cacheux, *Actes de la chancellerie d'Henri VI*, 2:161.
38. A feast for the dauphin, for example, included chick-pea or bean soup with salted meat, boiled and roasted beef, boiled mutton, roasted chicken, and small portions of cheese and fruit. In addition, the dauphin alone had a plate of boiled tripe. Bruno Laurioux, "Table et hièrarchie sociale à la fin du moyen âge," in *Du manuscrit à table: Essais sur la cuisine au moyen âge et répertoire des manuscrits médiévaux contenant des recettes culinaires*, ed. Carole Lambert (Montréal: University of Montréal Press, 1992), pp. 89–90 and 103; also, see Stephen Mennell, *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*, second edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p. 22. Mennell lists the foods served at the enthronement feast of Archbishop Neville in 1465: mutton, pork, goose, rabbit, fish, game, various birds, porpoise, and seal.
39. On the rise in meat consumption during the late Middle Ages, see Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, pp. 44–45; Louis Stouff, *Ravitaillement et alimentation en*

Provence aux XIVe et XVe siècles (Paris: Mouton, 1970), especially pp. 171–94; Christopher Dyer, "English Diet in the Later Middle Ages," in *Social Relations and Ideas: Essays in Honour of R. H. Hilton*, ed. T.H. Aston, P.R. Cross, Christopher Dyer, and Joan Thirsk (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 214.

40. JJ195, fol. 328r. . . .pour faire la festaige de lamessement dune sienne fille.
41. JJ118, fol. 181r. [Ils] venoient. . .de la feste de gesine a la femme boisart danis.
42. See van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, especially pp. 20–21 and 41–49.
43. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 2.
44. A.D. de l'Aube, G4188, fol. 64r. Item et petro grossin de torvillari adjuncto contra dominus johannes sartoris presbyterum capellenum loci Reum, . . . quod licet uxor predictus adversus In puerperio jacuisset eust qeust gallice per tres septimanas et amplius et requisiuit reum de ipsi recipiendo et relevando nichilominus ipse reus eamdem recusauit relevare et recipere ad ecclesiam ut moris est dicendo quod ipsam non relevaret eo quod non jacuerat per mense integrum. Concludit promoture ut mittare ad carceres et puniatur et adjunctus ad C s.t. [100 sous tournois]. (My thanks to Christelle Walravens for assistance with this text.)
45. A.D. de l'Aube, G4174, fol. 19v. Item contra Johannan relictam defunctus petrus varlet obstetrenem villa de vuapassonis cuiusdam eo quod ad misis ad purgacionem uxorem Johannis michau licet dictus Johannis michau status excommunicatus et aggravatus. (My thank to Christelle Walravens for help transcribing this record.)
46. A.D. de l'Aube, G4189, fol. 41v. Le promoteur et la femme de Claude Girost, qui se joint a lui, contre Messire Jean Barrois, chaplain de Torvilliers. . . .Il [Barrois] reconnait lui avoir dit "qu'elle n'avait pas jeu" pendant un mois, comme c'est l'usage a Torvilliers, et que la femme qui l'avait amenee n'etait pas l'accoucheuse.
47. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 94–97.
48. Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 102–106 and 125.
49. See chapter 3, p. 67.
50. du Plessis, *Histoire*, 2:540–41.
51. Avril, *Les Statuts synodaux angevins*, p. 102.
52. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime, G5271, unmarked folio. Thomassia Pierres confessa est peperisse de facto Francini LeFevre, ejus offidati, et non fuit purificata, sed presumpsit intrare ecclesiam et audire partem misse que tunc celebrabatur, de quo placuit emendam, et de emenda solvenda pro ea fidejusset Guillelmus Sautel, quem promisit servare indempnem.
53. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime, G250, fols. 72v–73r. Dominus Robertus Freboure presbyter. . .Eciam qui purificauit Johannetam quandam solutam sine litteris domini. Eciam purificauit tres alias de quibus nescit nomina. . .Eciam purificauit plures alias mulieres de quibus non recolit sine litteris domini. . .

54. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime, G5271, fol. 41v. (1486) Gilbetra lacousatur placuit emenda eo quod sponte confessa est coram nobis de partu In eam per Johannem capitanie genuit. sise levasse a lecto puerperii per tres diebus ante debitum et—Inde purificata fuisse Et de solvum fuit In missa cuiusdam presbyteri harefloti nec panem et alia solita habuit Et ad hoc fuit presense Ricardus Roussel alias aliene qui predicta de emenda solvenda fidemisset quam promisit Ipsam servare Indempnem die manum xiii Junii. Taxata ad xv soluti. Fol. 46r (1487) Ricardus aliene clericus a—gatus confessus fuit pluribus carnaliter cognouisse Gilbetra lacousatur solutam quam saniatur esse pregnans de facto ipse emendat carnaliter cognouisset[?] et scandalum negauit de facto ipsi esse pregnans quia gilbetra est omnibus communis dequaquid emenda promisit.
55. For cases other than the one described here, see: A.D. de la Seine-Maritime G258, fol. 91r, the case of Simonetta; G271, fol. 16r, the case of Jeanne la Caromie, and fol. 27r, the case of Alicia Pelerin. Also, see the case of Madam Castereyo in Dupont, *Registre de Cerisy*, p. 105.
56. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime G250, fols. 72v–73r. Lune ante Clementem. Dominus Robertus Freboure presbyter co—apud Guisotium fuit ad carceres in pane et aqua per mensem vel eo circa et post ea composuit ad sumam in capite descriptum cause et racionibus sequentes. . .Eciam purificauit tres alias de quibus nescit nomina et recipiebat pecunias spectans duam[?].
57. See chapter 1, p. 33.
58. For other cases than the one described here, see: A.D. de la Seine Maritime G270, fol. 6v, the case of Jeanne Herault; G257, fol. 17v, the case of Mahette la Renge; G259, fol. 105r, the case of Beatrice Castil; G271, fol. 29v, the case of Marrette du Aeuldroy.
59. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime G255, fol. 18v. Petronis Eustarii parrochiae Sancti Macuti Rothomagensis conjugatus. Emendauit quia pluries carnaliter cognouit et semel impregnauit Guillermam Henry solutam et fuit purificata prout c—dt—pro litteram de soluto cum soluta suggiendo que erat de quodam anglico et emendauit pro ea inhibitum fuit eidem ad penam excommunicatus et xx sous tourniensis de amplius frequenter cum ea in loco suspecto et pro ea in quantum impetrauit litteram de soluto cum soluta que est de data anni 1437 in martus post braudi[?] Soluit lx sous tourniensis.
60. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime, G259, fols. 104v–105r. Dominus Thomas Laurens presbyter capellanus de Heuguevilla. . .Item emendauit quia cum littere de soluto cum soluta purificauit Beatricem Castil solutam que conceperat ab Arnaldo Trenchelyon conjugate. Fuit in carceribus per tres hebdomadas.
61. For Jeanne Milies, see A.D. de la Seine-Maritme, G256, fol. 52v. Mercuriem ante festum sancti Barnabe. Johannes le Saumer clericus parrochiae Beatae Mariae de Noncastro locum Tourniensis baillum Caleten in vicecomitati Nonocastro. Emendauit quia pluries carnaliter cognouit Johannam uxorem Johannis Milies et emendauit pro inhibitum ad penam dicem librarum tourniensis ne amplius frequentet cum ea et fuit dicta

Johanna purificauit in ecclesiam hospitali de Nonocastro absque littera [fined: 10 libra]. For Willometa Songues, see A.D. de la Seine-Maritime, G271, fol. 41v. Tassinus le Carton pater Johannis Carton sui filius parrochiae Genouesse. Emendauit pro dicto suo filio quia ipse suus filius qui est solutus procurauit purificari Guillometam Songues solutam absque litteris nostris que pepererit de facto ipse Johannis Carton sui filii et nescit per quem nec ubi fuit purificata nisi que credit que fuit in hospital de Nonocasto.

62. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime G271, fol. 10v. Thomas Toustain alias Glachon parrochiae de Bouguelon. Emendauit personaliter et [per] filia Petri la Mort eius affidata in manu sacerdotis eo quod [pendens] tempore affidacionem carnaliter cognouit et impregnauit dictam eius affidatam que fuit purificata in conventu fratrarum carmeliscarum Pontisandum[?] sed nescit per quem et hoc absque litteris. Fuit in carceribus per diem. Pauper est.
63. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime G258, fol. 83v. Dominus Adam Syreau decanus de Gournays curatus Beatae Mariae de Nonocasto olim vicarius Pontifare quinta decembris anno predicto [1450]. Emendauit quia ipso existente vicario quandam solutam que alias ipso peperit in domo archiepiscali Pontifare in concubina tenuit carnaliter cognouit impregnauit jacere in lecto puerperio in dicta domo archiepiscali fecit et in eadam domo purificari ex quo ortum fuit in dicta villa Pontifare scandalum non modum fuit inhibitem ad penam x libris ne de cetero etc. diu predicta prefatus Syreau asseruit que dominus nostris communis dicta emenda sibi commitauit et remisit—de hoc nullatenus docuit. Ideo etc. The fact that all of this took place in the episcopal house, causing great scandal in the town, suggests that the bishop was a nonresident, absent from his diocese for long periods of time and unaware of, or unconcerned with, the situation in Pontifare. On the problem of nonresidence in Normandy in the fifteenth century, see Chaline, *Le Diocèse de Rouen-Le Havre*, pp. 48–53.
64. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime G266, fol. 39r. Johannus de Balleville conjugatus armiger dominus tempalis dicti loci die xviia juin 1463. Emendauit quia carnaliter cognouit et impregnauit Mariam des Champs euis ancillam et eam fecit purificari in domo dictas/des rendus[?] absque litteris nostris licet curia loci recusasset. Item ad emenda quia dedit eisdem Marie quatour ictus baculi supra brachia et alia membra sui corpis usque ad maximas murdaturas.
65. A.D. de la Seine-Maritime, G265, fol. 32v. Dominus Guillmus Loutrel presbyter cappellanus de Granbonvilla die vita novembris 1461. Emendauit quia pluries carnaliter cognouit et semel impregnauit quandam Katherinam [blank space] solutam qui jacuit in parrochia de Batevilla et non fuit purificata inhibemus ad penam 100 s. ne etc. [in margin: 60 s. tam per emenda quam purificata].

Chapter 7 *Le Jour de la Feste*

1. On the use of this image during the reforms of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Megan McLaughlin, "The Bishop as Bridegroom: Marital

Imagery and Clerical Celibacy in the Eleventh and Early Twelfth Centuries," in Frassetto, *Medieval Purity and Piety*, pp. 209–37.

2. Lemarignier, *Institutions ecclésiastiques*, p. 204. To guard the parish from intrusion by excommunicates, priests were supposed to turn away anyone they did not recognize except nobles and wandering artisans.
3. A.D. de l'Aube, G4188, fol. 64r. Reus se retulit ad confessioni adjuncti, qui adjunctus cum juromento interropatus asseruit ut continetur in sua [positionem]. Et ultra quod ipse remonstrauit dicto reo quod ipsa non erat excommunicate, qui reus respondit il est vray je scaray se je suis maistre ou varlet. (My thanks to Mme. Christelle Walravens for assistance with this text.)
4. See chapter 6, pp. 137–38.
5. A.D. de l'Aube, G4189, fol. 41v. Le promoteur et la femme de Claude Girost, qui se joint a lui, contre Messire Jean Barrois, chaplain de Torvilliers. Il y a moins de quinze jours, la femme de Claude Girost, voulant de faire ses relevailles, se rendit a l'eglise, mais Messire Jean Barrois lui dit qu'il ne procederait pas a la ceremonie si elle ne commencait par lui donner 5 sous tournois. L'accuse pretend qu'il n'a rien demande a la femme de Claude Girost. Il reconnait lui avoir dit "qu'elle n'avait pas jeu" pendant un mois, comme c'est l'usage a Torvilliers, et que la femme qui l'avait amenee n'etait pas l'accoucheuse. En outre, comme la demanderesse etait sous le coup d'un interdit ecclesiastique, a raison de ce que son mari etait excommunie et aggrave, il ne voulut pas et n'osa pas proceder a ses relevailles. Sur quoi le promoteur repond que le mari n'etait pas aggrave, mais seulement excommunie.
6. Boeren, "Les Plus anciens statuts," 155. Prohibemus ne pro mercede sepulture corpus sepelire differatur. Nec purificatio puerpere occasione male differatur neque coetera sacramenta, sed quid postea datum fuerit, gratis recipiatur.
7. d'Achery, *Spicilegium*, 1:729; also Avril, *Les Statuts synoduax angevines*, p. 96. Sunt plures rectores ecclesiarum et sacerdotes qui pravitatem simoniacam non timentes, benedictiones nuptiales, defunctorum sepulturas, mulieres purificationes celebrare non volunt, nisi prius certa pecuniae quantitas, vel aliud quod eisdem placeat, solvatur vel firmiter permittatur; quod etiam circa sacramentorum exhibitionem committere non formidant. Circa quae inquirendum Archidiaconos, Archipresbyteros, et Decanos praecipimus diligenter vigilare, et quos in istis reos invenerint, ab officio et beneficio suspendant, et denuntient esse suspensos, coram nobis eisdem certos dies assignantes, ut si rectores sint vel curati, eos beneficiis suis privemus; si vero sacerdotes non curati, ab Andegavis [dyocesi] perpetuo excludamus; alia eisdem nihilominus poena injungenda secundum Canonicam sanctionem.
8. For the text of this statute, see chapter 1, p. 33 and n. 92.
9. B.N. microfilm 2335. Nullus presbyter pro mercede sepulture corpus sepelire dimittat neque purificationem puerpere mala occasione differat. Et nullus presbyter par sepultura vel quolibet alio sacramento ecclesiastico conferendo aliquid exigat vel petat. Sed si sibi poste a quid datum fuerit illud presbyteri recipere possunt. For a nearly identical statute issued in early thirteenth-century Cambrai, see Boeren, "Les Plus anciens statuts," 155. For statutes prohibiting priests from taking fees for "marriage, burial, and other

church sacraments" but without mentioning churching, see Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Paris: H. Welter), 25:81–82 (Bayeux, ca. 1300); and Pontal, *Les Statuts synodaux*, p. 98 (Paris, 1208): no money should be asked for baptism, burial, blessings, or other church sacraments; and Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum*, 23:386 (Rouen, 1231–35): no money should be taken by force for marriage, burial, and other sacraments.

10. JJ120, fol. 58v. [Jourdain] estoit a le disner et souper a la priere[?] dudit Desquetot son prochain voisin avecques grant quantite de bonne gens leurs cousins et voisins desquel Jourdain et Desquetot. . .[ils] etoient au souper et faisoient bonne chiere sans aucune hayne. . .
11. JJ 195, fol. 328r. [Nandin Voisin] avoit entencion de tuer ung porceau et certains chevreaux quil vouloit abillez pour faire la festaige de lamessement dune sienne fille qui estoit acouschee denfant laquelle devoit aller le lendemain a a [*sic*] messe. . .
12. JJ 151, fol. 28v. . . .et lui priant et regnerant quil lui voulsist aidier a prendre en notre garenne six ou huit connins pour le jour de la feste des dites relevailles et lors le dit Guichart pour amour et affection quil avoit audit Alemant qui est frere de la femme dudit Guichart. . .lui accorda que volontes lui aideroit a prendre les diz connins et pour le dit cause. . .
13. JJ 175, fol. 38v, also in Le Cacheux, *Actes de la chancellerie d'Henri VI*, 2:195. [Jehan] faisoit bonne chiere avec pluseurs de ses amis, qui là estoient assemblez pour raison de la feste et gesine de sa femme, qui avoit esté acouchée d'enfant et relevée ce jour.
14. P.J.P. Goldberg, ed. and trans., *Women in England, c. 1275—1525, Documentary Sources* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 75.
15. The importance of churching feasts for men is also discussed by Becky R. Lee, "Men's Recollections of a Women's Rite: Medieval English Men's Recollections Regarding the Rite of Purification of Women after Childbirth," *Gender & History* 14.2 (2002): 229–33. Her evidence suggests political and economic as well as social concerns.
16. JJ135, fols. 35v–36v. [Perrin] euse sa femme gesant denfant et pour icelle purifier et relever au temps et selon le stile introduit en sainte eglise icellui perrin feust alez devers le chappellain de la dicte ville en son hostel. . .et lui requist quil voulsist relever sa femme le quel lui dist quil le feroit volenters et que il alast tantost fere aprester apres de le dit principal a la tantost faire aprester sa dicte femme et ses amis et voisins pour lui faire honneur et compaignie si comme acoustume est de faire aux preudefemmes. . .et se mist en grans fraiz pour ses amis festier et icellui ce faisant vint un homme qui lui dist quil perdoit sa peine et que sa femme ne seroit pas relevee. . .dont le dit principal fu moult dolent tant pour la honte et bergoigne quil receut en lieu donneur comme pour les fraiz quil avoit faiz et sen rettourna moult indigne. . .
17. Laurioux, "Table et hièrarchie," pp. 89–90.
18. Laurioux, "Table et hièrarchie," p. 99.
19. Claude Fouret, "La Violence en fête: La Course de l'epinette à Lille à la fin du moyen âge," *Revue du Nord* 63.249 (1981): 378–79.

20. Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, p. 50; also, see *Le Ménagier de Paris*, ed. Georgine E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 184–88.
21. Mennell, *All Manners of Food*, pp. 30 and 61.
22. *The Travels of Leo of Rozmital through Germany, Flanders, England, France, Spain, Portugal and Italy, 1465—1467*, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society, second series, 108, ed. and trans. Malcolm Letts (Cambridge, 1957), p. 47; also, see pp. 45–48 for the entire account of Elizabeth's churching, including the liturgy and processions to and from the church.
23. Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 366.
24. Late medieval violence was a phenomenon often noted by historians of the period. See, for example, Johan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1954), pp. 9–31; David Nicholas, *The Domestic Life of a Medieval City: Women, Children, and the Family in Fourteenth-Century Ghent* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), especially pp. 187–206 and *The Later Medieval City 1300—1500* (London: Longman, 1997), pp. 302–15. For a breakdown of violence according to social rank, see Fouret, "La Violence en fête," p. 387. On violence in Normandy and northern France, see Chaline, *Le Diocèse de Rouen-Le Havre*, pp. 45–63.
25. JJ173, fol. 285v. Que environ la toussains derrainement passee ledit Larchier ala a un jour de dimenche a une feste de gesine de la femme Michael Fontaine ou il fut a disner et fist bonne chiere et tant beut quil fut telement esprins de vin quil chei en yvresse et a loccasion de ce mesmement que le boire lavoit moult eschauffe y ot contempt et se meurent parolles rioteuses entre ledit Larchier et la femme dun nomme Fabien Marie laquelle lui dist pluseurs parolles injurieuses pour cause des quelles ledit Larchier print un pot destain en sa main et sefforca de la frapper pourquoy survint un nomme Aubin Alouf qui avoit espousee le suer dudit Fabien Marie qui le destourna et empescha de la ferir et contretint le coup et telement mena ledit Larchier quil le print et a grant force le bouta hors dudit hostel et lui ferma l'uis aux talons afin quil ny retournast. . . .Also printed in le Cacheux, 1:402–03.
26. Fouret, "La Violence en fête," p. 385.
27. Lalore, *Ancienne discipline*, 2:108. Instruant sacerdotes suas parrochianas ut a puerperio relevantes, cum ad ecclesiam eas primitus venire contigerint ad purificationem, quod faciant hoc honeste, hora decenti et consueta, non clam, sed publice, cum in hoc ministerio exhibeatur. Ecclesie reverencia, et honor maritalis, et partus legitimas comprobetur.
28. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 121–24.
29. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 62–63.
30. Smith, *Imagining Religion*, p. 62.
31. On French parishes of the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, see Lemarignier, *Institutions ecclésiastiques*, pp. 197–219 and 380–406; Aubrun, *La Paroisse en France*, pp. 107–82. Also, see Catherine D. Brown, *Pastor and*

Laity in the Theology of Jean Gerson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

32. Brown, *Pastor and Laity*, p. 209.
33. Lemarignier, *Institutions ecclésiastiques*, pp. 389–91.
34. Lemarignier, *Institutions ecclésiastiques*, pp. 392–93; also, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*; and André Vauchez, *Les Laïcs au moyen âge: pratiques et experiences religieuses* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1987).
35. On popular practices as superstition, see Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; on the opposite side of the debate, see Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*.
36. Alessandro Falassi, "Festival: Definition and Morphology," in *Time Out of Time: Essays on the Festival*, ed. Alessandro Falassi (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), p. 2.
37. Victor Turner, "Introduction," in *Celebration: Studies in Festival and Ritual*, ed. Victor Turner (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1982), p. 16.
38. The notion of "positional meaning" is based on the structuralist anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss and is described by Victor Turner in relation to festival in "Introduction," pp. 21–22.
39. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), Chapter Four, "Banquet Imagery in Rabelais," especially pp. 281–85 and 289–97.
40. Alessandro Falassi, "Feasts and Celebrations," in *Encyclopedia of Social History*, ed. Peter Stearns (New York: Garland, 1994), p. 271. See also Falassi, "Festival," pp. 1–10.

Epilogue and Conclusion

1. Pierre-Jakez Hélias, *Le Cheval d'orgueil; Memoires d'un breton du pays bigouden* (Paris: Plon, 1975), pp. 51–52.
2. Following her son's baptism, the priest blessed the mother without telling her what he was doing or why.
3. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 183.
4. See, for example, Martin Irvine, "Abelard and (Re)Writing the Male Body: Castration, Identity, and Remasculinization," in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1997), pp. 87–106 and Nancy Partner, "No Sex, No Gender," *Speculum* 68 (1993): 419–43. Partner's article is especially helpful. She offers a thoughtful discussion of and useful bibliography for the debate between social constructionists and essentialists concerning the formation of sexual identity and also makes a convincing case for the self-determined identity of Heloise based on her letters to Abelard.

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